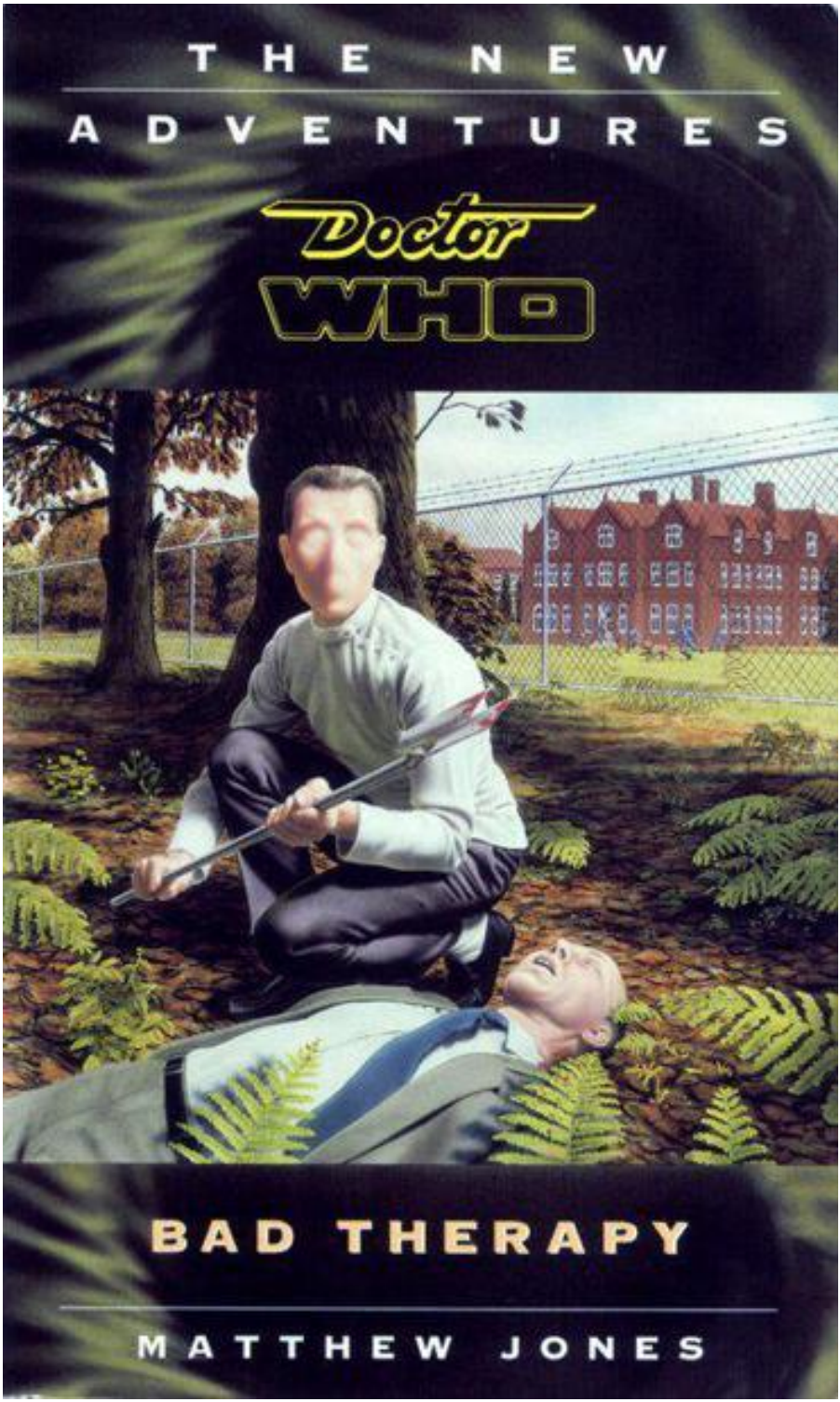
THE NEW ADVENTURES

Doctor WHO

BAD THERAPY

MATTHEW JONES



‘WE’RE NOT LIKE YOU – WE CAN’T BE WHOLE ON OUR OWN.’

Seeking respite after the traumatic events in the thirtieth century, the Doctor and Chris travel to 1950s London. But all is not well in bohemian Soho: racist attacks shatter the peace; gangs struggle for territory; and a bloodthirsty driverless cab stalks the night.

While Chris enjoys himself at the mysterious and exclusive Tropics club, the Doctor investigates a series of ritualistic murders with an uncommon link –

the victims all have no past. Meanwhile, a West End gangster is planning to clean up the town, apparently with the help of the Devil himself. And, in the quiet corridor of an abandoned mental hospital, an enigmatic psychiatrist is conducting some very bad therapy indeed.

As the stakes are raised, healing turns to killing, old friends appear in the strangest places – end even toys can have a sinister purpose.

MATTHEW JONES wrote 'The Nine-Day Queen' for the **Doctor Who** short story collection Decalog 2. He also writes a regular column, 'Fluid Links', for Marvel's Doctor Who Magazine. He lives in east London and this is his first novel.

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BAD THERAPY

Matthew Jones

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condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

For Iain, with love.

Publishers' Announcement

The story in this volume, like that in most of the New Adventures, is a continuation of the events described in the preceding book.

Unfortunately, it has proved impossible to publish *So Vile A Sin* by Ben Aaronovitch on time. The publishers apologise for this; however, we do intend to publish the book in early 1997.

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1

The Colour Of His Hair

Soho, London – October 1958

Teenagers! Madge thought to herself. She didn't even like the word. Why did they have to go and call themselves something special anyway? She had never been a teenager and frankly, she didn't see why anyone else had to be one. As far as she was concerned when you were young you were a kid and by the time you were old enough to go out to work you were an adult. She couldn't understand why there was this sudden need to be 'in between'.

There hadn't been any in between for her, no time for her to be a teenager –

in love or otherwise. Madge had left school at thirteen to sweep floors and wash hair at her local hairdressing salon. Thirty-five years later she was still working at the same place, only now it was her name on the lease. She had bought the shop with her savings when the previous owner had finally retired. Snips Salon had never done such good business since she had taken it on. Madge had expanded the business and now employed a staff of eight, including two juniors whose sole responsibilities were to tend to the sinks and keep the floor clean. Mind you, all they wanted to do all day was listen to that awful racket on the radio and paw over copies of *Movie News*. But that was teenagers for you.

Until today she had been sure that Eddy Stone was different to the rest of the young staff that she employed. In all her years in the trade she had never met such an amiable lad, and certainly no one as hardworking. Most of the girls who worked for her saw the job as a way of earning a few bob before they got married. The lads usually lasted longer, but that was because they were rarely the marrying kind. Eddy Stone was different: he was always anxious to please, and always behaved as if the job really meant something to him. Or so Madge had thought until today.

She had barely been able to believe her eyes when Eddy had walked into the shop that morning. He had had the bare-faced cheek to act as if everything was absolutely normal, even when the junior girls who took care of the sinks had burst into fits of giggles. If it had been anyone else Madge would have sacked them on the spot. It was only because this was so out of character for 1

the boy that she had decided to wait until the end of the day, when she could confront him privately.

From where she stood at the back of the salon she had a clear view of him as he finished with his last customer of the day – an elderly woman who tottered in once a week for a rinse and set. Eddy was giving her his usual performance, treating the old girl as if she were the latest Hollywood starlet. He fussed around her, making tiny adjustments to her hair as if it were a great piece of art. Not that it was of course. Eddy wasn't actually that great a cutter. In fact, he was a rather pedestrian stylist. But Madge had been in the hairdressing business long enough to know that it wasn't just a question of cutting hair.

A good stylist sold dreams, and Eddy Stone was a born salesman. His true talents didn't lie with his scissors, but in the way he made his customers feel about themselves. He could make a middle-aged housewife feel ten years younger with the right amount of flirtatious banter. To the older customers he became a favourite nephew or grandson.

His present customer, an old girl of at least seventy, kissed him on the cheek before leaving the shop, her face flushed from all the attention. Eddy wandered over to the till and put his sizable tip into the jar kept there for that purpose. He was honest too.

Which made what Madge knew she had to do all the more difficult. He caught sight of her and smiled that shy, uncertain smile of his. Madge almost smiled back, but just managed to catch herself. However charming the boy was, he had overstepped the mark coming to work looking like he had this morning. Far overstepped the mark.

'I'd like a word, Eddy,' she said firmly. 'In my office, if you please.'

Eddy frowned, but nodded and followed her quietly into her room at the back of the shop. 'Office' was a bit of an exaggeration. It was nothing more than a desk, chair and safe in the corner of the storeroom. She shared the room with boxes of shampoo and the other

tools of the trade. Laundry bags full of damp towels were left here at the end of each day, investing the room with a permanent 'washing day' atmosphere.

Perching herself on the edge of her desk, Madge lit a cigarette. She offered one to Eddy, but he shook his head.

'I'm sure you know why I've called you in here.'

Eddy blushed and looked at his feet. 'I guess,' he murmured.

'It's not me, you understand. I don't care what you do, but I've had com-plaints from some of the regular customers and I can hardly ignore that, now can I?'

Eddy looked up at her and for a moment Madge thought he was going to speak, but he didn't say anything. He just stood there looking lost and vulnerable.

2

'Look love, there's no need to get upset. You can keep your job, just dye it back, all right?'

'I can't.'

'What do you mean, you can't? Of course you can.' Madge gently ran her fingers through Eddy's newly blond hair. He'd done a good job, she had to give him that. If she hadn't known that Eddy's hair was really chestnut brown, she would have sworn it was natural. 'I'll tell you what, we'll do it now – in the shop, it won't take an hour.'

'No,' Eddy said quickly. 'I can't.'

Madge frowned. He didn't sound upset now, he sounded a little angry, almost defiant; like a child preparing to throw a tantrum.

'You'll do as you're told, Eddy Stone,' she snapped, more harshly than she had really meant to. 'I'm not having you mincing around my shop looking like a ponce. Don't take it too far, lad. You're good at what you do, but that doesn't mean your job's for life.'

Eddy flinched at the insult, but he met her gaze. 'They'll get used to it, Madge,' he said quietly. 'People forget. But I can't change me hair. I won't.

Not for you. Not for anyone.'

‘What do you mean, you can’t change it? You bloody well can. You bloody well will as well, if you want to keep your job.’

For a moment they stood staring at each other in silence.

Why was he behaving like this? Madge hadn’t thought that Eddy cared about anything enough to make such a fuss, let alone his hair. It was such a silly thing to get so stirred up about. Well, there was no backing down now.

She wasn’t going to have her authority undermined by a teenager, that was for sure. She made up her mind.

‘You can pick your wages up tomorrow night when I cash up. I don’t want to see you until then, and I definitely don’t want to see you after. You understand?’

Eddy Stone just turned on his heel and walked straight out of the shop, not even bothering to pick up his jacket from the hook near the door. Madge felt stunned. She took a long drag on her cigarette and sat down behind her desk.

It was only his bloody hair. What on Earth had got into the boy?

Eddy ran out of the salon and into the rain. At half-past seven in the evening, London’s West End was already bustling with people. Rather than dodge the crowds on the pavement, he ran in the gutter where you only had to be mindful of puddles and black cabs. The rain cooled his temper and he slowed to a brisk walk as he turned on to Wardour Street, relieved to be leaving Leicester Square and Snips Salon behind him.

3

The job didn’t matter, he told himself. Jobs were easy to come by: he could find another. Even if he couldn’t, Mother would be able to fix him up with something.

Mother.

Perhaps he should drop in on the club and tell her what had happened?

He smiled to himself. It didn’t really matter whether or not he did as she would know soon enough. Very little escaped Mother’s attention for long, not if it involved him or one of the others. It was comforting

knowing that she was always there, always someone to turn to if he found himself in trouble or needed help. And yet, perhaps that would change along with everything else that was happening to him.

He had arranged to meet Jack in the Magpie at eight. There wasn't time to go home and change. Still he looked all right; he always dressed smartly for work. The old dears who came to Snips always liked him to be well turned out. Eddy stopped and checked his reflection in a shop window and wondered what Jack would make of his hair.

Just thinking about Jack brought a smile to Eddy's face. They had been stepping out for about five weeks now. Eddy knew for a fact that Jack was keeping a count of the exact number of days. That was just like Jack; the boy was a born worrier.

Jack worked as a clerk on one of the sprawling building sites on the Marylebone Road. Every night after work they would meet for a drink in Soho at the Magpie, before heading back to Jack's lodgings in Notting Hill.

So far they had managed to keep their relationship secret from Jack's landlady, Mrs Carroway, who zealously patrolled the hall outside her ground-floor rooms. To avoid her, Eddy would slip around the back of the rundown three storey townhouse, climb the wrought iron fire escape and then wait for Jack to let him in through the upstairs window. Jack was always fretting that one day Mrs Carroway would come in unexpectedly – for the washing, or to do the cleaning – and catch Eddy there; but so far she hadn't. And Eddy was pleased that, despite being frightened that they might be caught together, Jack had never once suggested that Eddy not come home with him.

Jack shared the large, draughty room with Mikey, a Jamaican who worked as a brickie on the same site as Jack. Of course, Mikey knew that Eddy stayed over, and while he frequently made his disapproval of their relationship clear, he had never voiced his objections to the landlady. Mikey, who was almost twenty, had lived in London for a couple of years, ever since he had left Jamaica to look for work. Mikey didn't get on very well with his family back home, corresponding only by short, terse messages scrawled on the back of postcards. Recently, life at Mrs Carroway's had become a little cramped since Mikey's younger brother, Dennis, had moved in with them. So now there were

two new 'guests' to be kept hidden from the prying eyes of Mrs

Carroway.

Mikey's brother Dennis was nine and two months; at least this is what he would proudly boast if anyone asked. Mother had arranged a job for him selling the *Evening News* from a stand on Wardour Street. As Eddy had half an hour to kill before meeting up with Jack, he decided to pay the boy a visit and keep him company in the rain.

The weather had worsened by the time Eddy arrived at Dennis's pitch on Wardour Street. The stall was there, sheltered from the rain in the mouth of a narrow alley. A stack of soggy newspapers lay pinned down by a half-brick on the makeshift table, but little Dennis was nowhere to be seen. Eddy felt the first prickle of anxiety when he saw that Dennis had left the cash box beside the damp papers. Something was wrong.

From somewhere behind him came a high-pitched shriek. The sound of a child in pain. Eddy turned and saw a tight knot of figures a little way down the alley behind the paper stall. Despite the darkness in the alley, he recognized the small shape of Dennis lying on the ground in the middle of the group. The boy was on his hands and knees, struggling uncertainly to his feet. The tallest of the three men shoved the West Indian boy back on to the ground as he tried to stand. Eddy heard Dennis squeal as a well placed kick caught him in the stomach.

Eddy forgot about Jack and the day's events at the salon. Without pausing to think, he ran into the alley and leapt on to the back of the man who had kicked Dennis, his momentum taking them both to the ground. The man fell awkwardly and Eddy was satisfied to hear him cry out in pain as his head connected sharply with the pavement.

'Run Dennis,' Eddy heard himself shout. 'Run and tell Mother. Quickly.'

The little boy scampered away, disappearing quickly around a comer of the alley.

As Eddy clambered to his feet preparing to run himself, rough hands picked him up and pushed him against the alley wall. One of the men was about to deliver a punch to his face when he was interrupted by another.

'Leave him.' The voice came from Dennis's attacker, the man whom Eddy had brought to the ground. 'Leave him for me.'

A petrol lighter flared uncomfortably close to Eddy's face. He flinched

from the heat, but the grip of the men prevented him from moving away. A young ginger-haired man with a deep graze on his cheek swam into Eddy's vision.

The red-haired man giggled. It was a soft, high noise. Something about it made Eddy shiver.

'We've been looking for you, Eddy Stone.' The ginger-haired man whispered, wincing a little as he spoke. A swollen tear of blood ran down his face from the cut on his cheek.

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The ginger-haired man brought his hand up to the cut on his face and then looked at the blood on his fingers. Smiling without humour, he traced a red line across Eddy's throat. Metal flashed in the orange flame of the lighter: the ginger-haired man was holding a cut-throat razor delicately between his finger and thumb, his eyes glittering in the fire.

'We was coming for you next, but now you've saved us the bother.'

Eddy was transfixed by the approaching blade. This man was going to slit his throat. They were going to kill him. This wasn't just a beating or the antics of bullies, they had meant to cut the boy. They had meant to kill little Dennis.

And him too.

Something cold touched his neck and at that moment Eddy Stone realized that the ginger-haired man must know who he was – must know *what* he and little Dennis were. That realization filled him with as much terror as the knife at his throat.

He had to get away. Get to Mother. Warn the others. Eddy brought his knee up into his attacker's groin.

The ginger-haired man grunted loudly and fell heavily against Eddy, howling in pain as the petrol lighter slipped in his grip, burning his fingers before falling extinguished to the ground. Darkness.

Reaching for the ginger-haired man's face, Eddy dug his fingernails into the fresh wound on the man's cheek. The knife-man shrieked in agony and let him go.

Eddy sprinted further down the alley, trying desperately to remember

which street it led out on to in the maze of Soho. He hurtled around a corner, hearing the men behind him start to give chase. And then he ran straight into something solid.

FREE FOR USE OF PUBLIC

ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE OBTAINABLE IMMEDIATELY

PULL TO OPEN

A police telephone box was blocking the alley. For a second Eddy just stared at it blankly. It was impossible. Why would the police put one of their boxes in an alley? There was a slim gap at one side, through which Dennis must have escaped, but it was far too small to allow Eddy passage.

He started to hammer on the door. Let there be an officer inside. A red-faced constable who'll come out with a frown on his face to see what all the noise is about. Please let there be someone there. Anyone at all. Please.

The doors of the police box seemed to absorb the power of his blows. It was as if the box were a solid concrete block. Eddy barely managed to produce a sound on the sturdy frame.

6

Somebody please hear me. Please.

Footsteps heralded the arrival of the ginger-haired man and his thugs. Eddy turned to face them, pressing his back against the doors of the police box, unable to think of anything else to do.

The ginger-haired man walked straight up to him, smiled brightly, and then plunged his knife into Eddy's throat.

'That's the trouble with the law,' he giggled, as Eddy started to scream.

'They're never around when you need them.'

Christopher Cwej set his knife and fork down, and dabbed at his mouth with his napkin. When his companion enquired as to whether he had enjoyed his meal, Chris looked down at the traces of sauce on his plate and realized that he had no idea what he had just eaten at all.

He ran his tongue around the inside of his mouth searching for a clue to the meal, but only found a dull blur of flavours. It was as if his taste buds had all been deadened. But then all his senses felt numb. Everything had since Roslyn Forrester had died. He felt a few inches away from reality, unconnected to the world around him. Even speaking was an effort – he'd try to talk and then flounder, abandoning his sentences half made.

And then he'd remember that Roz often used to finish his sentences for him. They'd been a team, him and Roz. Roslyn Forrester and Chris Cwej against the Universe. Forrester and Cwej – he'd always liked the sound of their partnership. He'd been so proud just to be associated with her. He would always be proud of that.

Chris had been assigned to Roslyn Forrester soon after leaving college, playing wide-eyed rookie to her cynical street cop. He could see her now, one hand resting wearily on her hip, squinting at him, eyebrow raised as she made a wise crack – usually about his inexperience and naiveté, and always at his expense.

Their professional partnership hadn't lasted long. Police officers who blow the whistle on corruption in their own organization do not have bright career prospects, nor healthy mortality rates. And then the Doctor, that oh-so-mysterious traveller in Time and Space, had whisked them off to adventures new in his TARDIS; with what remained of their careers abandoned. Forrester and Cwej had become Roz and Chris; their professional partnership transformed into the strongest friendship Chris had ever known. That friendship had been his anchor in the endless insecurity and change which were the inevitable product of time travel. And now there was only insecurity.

Insecurity and the Doctor.

Chris looked up at his companion sitting opposite him in the restaurant. The Doctor was still eating; stabbing each piece of food with his fork, examining 7

it with a myopic childlike intensity, before popping it into his mouth, his face contorting with pleasure as he relished the flavours. It was as if the man had never eaten anything before. Sometimes Chris thought that the Doctor woke up every morning and encountered the Universe afresh.

Roz used to say that the Doctor was a one-thousand-year-old toddler. Constantly surprised and enchanted by the Universe as he encountered

it. Despite being envious of such an innocent view of the world, they both knew that this was only half the picture. The other half was only rarely glimpsed and, like a mountain seen through mist, could never be wholly comprehended. The Doctor had travelled more widely than anyone else that Chris had ever met, and it was clear that the Doctor always knew more than he would – or perhaps could – say. For the knowledge he had acquired on his long travels seemed to bind as much as it helped him. Chris was still only just beginning to appreciate how different from everyone else the Doctor really was.

Their relationship had changed in the weeks since Roz's death. It was only since she had gone that Chris realized that he always encountered the Doctor as Roz's partner. It was hard to adjust to travelling alone with the little man.

The Doctor himself had said very little since Roz had died, and nothing of how he felt about her death.

They had spent the last month or so making a series of brief visits in the TARDIS, only staying in one place for a matter of days, or even a few hours.

Chris could only remember a handful of their destinations: a junk market on a small low gravity moon where the Doctor had rummaged through endless skips full of battered electronic equipment, looking, he said, for spares; then on to a water-covered world where they had swam with the nomadic amphibi-ous inhabitants; and most recently a transport museum housed in an artificial satellite where Chris had self-consciously flown an assortment of aircraft while the Doctor had looked on, like an estranged father weekending with his son.

Finally, the Doctor had brought them to Earth, his home from home. Somewhere, he had said, where they might rest for a while.

According to the Doctor, the city was London and the year was 1958. Chris looked around the small restaurant to which the Doctor had brought him. The restaurant appeared to attract a wide variety of people. A young woman sat at the bar smoking a filterless cigarette. She wore a tight black sweater, her hair was dyed brilliant orange and hung down to her shoulders where it curled under itself. She was either very ill, or had been over zealous when applying her make-up as she had a ghostly pallor and bloodless lips. The paleness of her face was contrasted by her eyes which were heavily outlined with black mascara. She seemed completely oblivious to everything going on around her, intent on smoking her cigarette which she did with great

intensity and affectation.

8

An elderly woman sat on her own at a small table away from the bar drinking a pint of dark beer. She had finished her meal some time ago and was now murmuring softly to herself. Every few moments she would pour some of her beer on to the bench beside her where a small terrier would jump up and lick the puddle dry. For some inexplicable reason this caused the old woman to whoop with glee.

The restaurant, which was tucked away in a part of the city which the Doctor had called Soho, was cheap and tatty: although, despite its squalor, it appeared to enjoy a brisk trade. As Chris surveyed the room, a commotion broke out at a table near the door. A woman, who Chris guessed was in her late forties, had stood up and was now shouting at her male companion, a well-dressed older man who had flushed bright red.

'You may drive a Rolls Royce for all I know, *deah*,' the woman said loudly, projecting her aristocratic voice so the whole restaurant could hear, 'but that still does not entitle you to put your hand up my dress. Not in public and certainly not when I'm dining at the French.' And with that, the woman picked up her half-full glass of red wine and threw it in her companion's face. 'Now, perhaps you would be good enough to bugger off, but not before,' she added quickly. 'you've settled the bill with Gaston.'

Her companion complied meekly and then hurried out of the restaurant.

The woman turned and caught sight of Chris staring at her across the room.

'Politicians,' she exclaimed, before turning her attention to the landlord, Gaston, who had arrived at her table to refill her wineglass.

The woman was tall and painfully thin, with striking, hawk-like features.

She wore her jet black hair scraped back over her head, reminding Chris, simultaneously, of an aging prima donna ballerina and a Victorian governess.

Despite having caused the most enormous scene she seemed completely at her ease, sharing a joke with Gaston.

‘She seems like an interesting person; shall we invite her to join us for coffee?’ The Doctor asked and, not waiting for an answer to his question, waved her over.

The distraction over, Chris felt the familiar ache of grief return. The last thing he wanted to do was socialize. ‘Actually, Doctor,’ he began, ‘I’m not sure that I’m very good company at the moment.’

‘ *Deah*, you can’t possibly be any worse company than that tiresome fat old man. Right Honourable. Right *Dis* honourable, more like it,’ the woman exclaimed as she marched towards them. Chris felt himself blush furiously. How on Earth had she managed to hear him from the other side of the restaurant?

‘I’m sorry, I didn’t mean. . . ’ But the dark-haired woman dismissed his apology with a wave of her hand. She sat down and refilled her wineglass from their bottle. ‘You’ll get used to me, I’m an acquired taste,’ she said, took a large 9

gulp of wine and then grimaced. ‘A bit like this wine. What are you drinking?’

She turned and shouted over to the bar, ‘Gaston, what kind of filth are you trying to pass off on my friends? Bring us something decent immediately or I shall be forced to dine here all next week. And if you don’t bring the wine here in thirty seconds I shall bring all my friends with me when I come.’

The woman returned her attention to the Doctor and Chris. ‘I’m Tilda, Tilda Jupp.’ She extended a hand which the Doctor kissed lightly. Chris shook it politely.

‘I’m the Doctor and this is my friend, Christopher Cwej.’

‘The Doctor? How mysterious. I like that in a man.’

Gaston arrived with the wine. After three glasses had been poured, Tilda asked what had brought the two travellers to Soho.

‘We’re resting in London for a little while,’ the Doctor explained. ‘Planning to see the sights, that sort of thing.’

Tilda brightened. ‘Then you can’t possibly miss out on an evening at the Tropics. It’s a little club I run. Strictly informal. Opens after the pubs shut.

Theatre people mostly. The drinks aren't cheap, but I'm sure you'll adore it.'

She brandished a card which the Doctor perused politely.

'Ah, it sounds intriguing, but I'm afraid it's a little past my bedtime. However, it sounds perfect for my companion,' the Doctor commented, handing the card over to Chris.

'Then that's settled. I shall expect you at eleven, Christopher.'

Chris nodded wearily, knowing that the Doctor wasn't going to allow him a quiet evening on his own. 'Very well, eleven it is, Ms Jupp.'

'Oh call me Mother, *deah*,' Tilda said as she knocked back the last of her wine and made to leave. 'Everyone does.'

The Doctor made his way through the side streets of Soho, using his extensive knowledge of the city to take a quiet short-cut back to where the TARDIS

stood, waiting patiently for him. He didn't want to walk amongst the crowds tonight, didn't want to be surrounded by the human creatures who populated this tiny world. Despite his fascination with them, tonight they seemed too fragile and he too clumsy to be in their company. For once, he wasn't on the lookout for adventure, didn't want to get caught up in someone else's problems, or help the vulnerable fight back against tyranny and cruelty. Tonight this little blue-green planet would just have to look out for itself.

He stopped outside the TARDIS and rummaged in the pockets of his tweed jacket for the key and fiddled with the odd-looking instrument between his fingers. Well, tonight he would let himself rest. He'd tinker with the TARDIS

systems or perhaps just sit by the fire in the library and read. He was relieved that Chris seemed to have made a new friend. He smiled to himself – even if he 10

had taken a little persuading. That young man could use a few distractions.

He could benefit from being reminded that although Roslyn Forrester was dead, he, himself, was still alive.

As the Doctor slipped the key into the lock of the police box door, he

heard a low moan from somewhere near his feet. He froze – the key half in the lock.

In the long shadow of the alley wall lay the body of a young man. His clothes were drenched from the rain and his blond hair was plastered to his head in short rat-tails. A dark puddle spilt out from beneath his blue-white face. Air bubbled up through the blood which frothed in the corners of his mouth.

The Doctor stared at the boy for a long moment before looking up at the sliver of night visible above the alley. ‘Couldn’t you try and get along without me, just once?’ he whispered. ‘Just for tonight? Just for a little time?’

And then putting such indulgent thoughts away in a battered box somewhere deep in his mind, the Doctor tucked the TARDIS key back into one of his many pockets and began to tend to the boy’s wounds.

11

2

Used To Be A Sweet Boy

‘Let me get this straight in my head, sir. Are you saying that you don’t know at what time the young man was admitted to the hospital?’

‘He wasn’t actually admitted at all. We found the patient in one of the cubicles in casualty being tended by. . . well, by someone unknown to the hospital.’

Chief Inspector Harris frowned. ‘I see. And what did this man look like?’

‘I don’t know,’ the young doctor replied. ‘I wasn’t down there then. Sister ought to know, I think she was the one who discovered him.’

Chief Inspector Harris turned to his sergeant. ‘Track down the sister and bring her up here, would you, Bridie?’

His young Irish sergeant nodded eagerly and, clutching his notebook in his hand, left the staffroom which Harris had commandeered for the investigation. Harris felt little cheered by this display of enthusiasm. He turned back to the junior doctor whose name he’d forgotten.

‘So, a person unknown enters your hospital this evening in the company of a severely injured young man, uses the hospital’s facilities without any nurse or doctor knowing anything about it, and then disappears into thin air immediately after being discovered. I’d say that you’ve got a bit of a security problem here, wouldn’t you?’

Harris didn’t wait for an answer from the harassed-looking young man in front of him. Poor bugger probably hadn’t slept in a week. Harris dismissed him after asking him to call the station if he remembered anything else.

Alone in the staffroom, Harris exhaled and wandered over to the window which looked out upon Cleveland Street. The investigation was undoubtedly the most important of the year, certainly the most important that he had ever worked upon, and the evidence was fast disappearing into the air.

Sergeant Bridie returned accompanied by a distressed-looking nurse. Sister Martin clutched a handkerchief in her hand, which she used to punctuate every sentence, dabbing at her wrinkled, red eyes.

Harris listened silently to her account, taking slow, deep breaths to try to suppress the mounting frustration he felt. He had rather hoped that Sister Martin would provide a clue to the identity of the boy, but it was clear that 13

she knew little more than the young doctor he had interviewed. Sister Martin had been guiding a seven-year-old girl with a broken wrist to what she had assumed was a vacant curtained bay in casualty, only to discover it occupied by a man and a boy. Her account was strangely incomplete. Although she could remember exactly what the man had said and done, she had no memory of what he looked like. It was as if that information had been plucked from her mind.

The man, now faceless in her memory, had looked up from tending to the boy, and said: ‘Ah, Nurse, there you are at last. We’re going to need at least four pints of blood, fresh dressings, sterile instruments and you’d better put whatever provision you have for cardiac arrest on standby – just as a precau-tion you understand, but we can’t be too careful.’

At this point in her story, Sister Martin had paused and swallowed painfully before continuing. For the faceless man had dipped a finger casually into one of the open wounds on the boy’s neck, licked it and – as if identifying a good wine – had announced: ‘O Rhesus negative, if

I'm not mistaken. At the rate this young man is losing the stuff, I think you'd better make that five pints.

Now be a good person and hurry. There's an outside chance that we might save this young fellow's life.'

Fighting back her shock and nausea, Sister Martin had ordered the man to stand away from the boy before he did any more damage, and then had called for assistance. After trying in vain to persuade her to let him stay and help, the man had darted off when he spotted two orderlies hurrying down the corridor towards him. By the time they had arrived on the scene the intruder had completely disappeared.

Despite every effort by the casualty staff, the boy had died twenty minutes later. He hadn't regained consciousness.

'Nothing like this has ever happened here before,' the sister concluded. 'I still can't believe that it could happen in this department, and whilst I was on duty. I'm responsible for that lad's death, Chief Inspector. If I'd only been more vigilant, then that lunatic would never have got near him and we might have been able to provide proper treatment.'

Harris silently indicated to Bridle that the interview was at an end and he watched his sergeant gently guide the middle-aged woman from the room. A question formed in Harris's mind as they reached the door, and he'd voiced it before he realized how crazy it was.

'Sister Martin. What did the boy's blood type turn out to be?'

'O Rhesus negative, Inspector,' she managed, before bursting into tears once more.

* * *

14

The morgue was tucked away at the back of the lower-ground floor of the Middlesex Hospital. It took Chief Inspector Harris a good ten minutes to find the long cool room; hospitals are not in the business of publicizing the existence and hence the locations of their mortuaries. Marble-topped benches were spaced regularly throughout the room which was in semi-darkness. The morgue had a distinctive odour: Harris recognized the stale sweet scent of death that no amount of cleaning and disinfectant could scrub away.

The room was windowless. The outlines of the bare bricks of the walls were visible despite layers of thick creamy paint. The only source of light came from a single lamp which burnt above one of the benches. A naked human shape lay on top. Someone was working late this evening. Harris paused in the doorway unsure whether he wanted to disturb the worker from their grim trade. If it hadn't been for the matter of the boy's missing personal possessions Harris would have turned on his heel and left.

The sound of water running from a tap came from a small door beyond the slab. Harris walked over to the corpse. There was no doubt that it was the boy who had been brought to the hospital earlier that evening. Even if he hadn't recognized him from the description, he would have known those wounds anywhere.

The sound of the running water stopped. Harris, suddenly aware that he was present without invitation, glanced back anxiously at the door through which he had entered.

'Don't feel that you have to leave on my account.'

Harris turned to see a small man standing in the doorway of an anteroom.

He was dressed in a mortician's robe and was drying his hands on a paper towel. The man wore a hygiene mask over his mouth. A few strands of dark wavy hair escaped from beneath a paper hairnet. Only his eyes were clearly visible; icy blue and bright with intelligence and curiosity.

Harris didn't recognize this pathologist from the hundreds of crime scenes he had attended during his long tenure at Charing Cross. 'I'm sorry to disturb you, Doctor. . . ?' Harris began.

The robed man didn't seem to hear the question. 'You're not disturbing me, Chief Inspector. I'm merely doing a preliminary examination before the chief pathologist conducts the autopsy.'

'That'll be Salter, won't it?'

'Salter? Oh, that's right. Good man. Tell me, have you ever seen anything like this before?'

'Oh yes,' Harris murmured. The two deep gouges at the base of the boy's neck were all too familiar. Large sections of flesh had been hastily and untidily removed. Harris met the pathologist's gaze. 'This

lad is the sixth. I've seen this five times in the last six months.'

15

The pathologist paused in his examination. Harris noticed that he ran his fingers absently through the dead boy's blond hair. The gesture was distinctly paternal. 'Six people have been killed like this?'

Harris tensed at the unspoken accusation, suddenly feeling that he had to defend his investigation. 'Look, Doctor. . . '

The pathologist just stared at him.

'Look, er, Doctor. I'm working flat out on this case, but none of the usual procedures are producing any positive results.' Harris found himself telling this strange nameless doctor about the investigation. 'The fifth victim was a coloured girl. No more than seventeen. Chinese kids from one of the big laundries found her stuffed behind a bush while they were playing ball in Soho Square.'

The Doctor winced. 'And the mode of killing was the same?'

'Exactly like this poor lad.' Harris looked at the body of the boy. You didn't have to be a pathologist to know that the same man was behind both killings.

'You said that usual police methods weren't working?'

'They aren't. Not at all. Despite what you might read in the papers, Doctor, the majority of murders are easy to solve. At Charing Cross, our clear-up rate for murder is three times better than it is for burglary or arson. For all the shouting that goes on about the streets not being safe any more, the person who is most likely to do away with you is not some deranged lunatic but your nearest and dearest. Unless of course they're one and the same person.

In most murder investigations our first step is to take the husband – and it usually is the husband – down to the station for a little chat. If it's not the husband, then it's a work mate, brother or friend.'

'But stranger killings are different, aren't they?' the Doctor interrupted.

'The connection between the killer and the victim is not their relationship, it is something else, something indirect.'

‘In these murders, there is no connection at all.’

The Doctor leant over the corpse to examine the boy’s neck, probing the ragged wounds with his fingertips. Harris was slightly unsettled to notice that the Doctor wasn’t wearing surgical gloves.

‘Oh, there are always connections, Chief Inspector. They’re just harder to find.’

‘Normally I’d agree with you, but not in this case. This is completely different to anything I’ve worked on before. We’ve been unable to track down any relatives for the victims, living or dead. No personal records at all.’

‘Interesting. Perhaps they’ve come from another planet.’

‘Very funny, sir. I’m a police officer, I don’t read science fiction.’

The Doctor smiled. ‘Really, Chief Inspector? I’m rather fond of it myself.

But reality is always so much more interesting, don’t you find? Now tell me, 16

these people with no pasts, didn’t they have friends or jobs?’

Harris sighed – he’d told this story before. ‘Each of them was stepping out with someone. We spoke to the coloured girl’s fiancé–’

The Doctor stood up from his work, a pained expression on his face. He rubbed his forehead with his fingers, unintentionally leaving a smear of the dead boy’s blood behind as he did so. ‘Didn’t she have a name, Chief Inspector?’

‘I’m sorry?’ Harris said, transfixed by the scarlet stain on the Doctor’s forehead.

‘The poor woman is dead. The least we can do is respect her memory by using her name when we talk of her. Hmm?’

Harris shrugged. ‘As you like, Doctor, as you like. Her name was Mary.

Mary Ridgeway. I spoke to her fiancé. Eight weeks they’d been stepping out together, and yet he didn’t know more than her name and address. He’d never met any of her friends. She’d apparently never mentioned her family, either here or back home. And it wasn’t

just the boyfriend; the factory where she worked hadn't taken any references because of the casual nature of the work.

Immigration had never heard of her. As far as anyone could tell she had just dropped out of the sky. Except of course, that's impossible, isn't it?' Harris added, rhetorically.

'Is it?' the Doctor asked, as if genuinely considering the possibility.

'Yes. I think so. Don't you?'

Eyes twinkling, the Doctor replied, 'I should think it highly improbable, to say the least. What about the others? Are their life histories just as elusive?'

'Six people have been murdered and not one of them had so much as a post office savings account to their name. It started in the summer when a pensioner was found lying in the gutter on Gerrard Street. Apparently, she'd been walking home from the pictures with her new husband, another geri-atric. He'd stepped into a pub for a packet of Players and come out to find her face down in the drain. Thought she'd had a heart attack, until he turned her over and caught sight of all the blood.'

'He must have known more about her, if they were married?'

Harris shook his head. 'Theirs was a whirlwind romance. They'd only met six weeks before she was killed. The old boy knew no more about her than the others. He turned out to be quite a well-known painter in his day, although apparently his particular style had fallen out of favour with the critics and he hadn't sold anything for years. The two of them lived quietly in a basement flat in Fitzrovia. Eccentric, but harmless.'

Harris watched the Doctor finish his examination of the dead boy. The little man tossed his surgical robes carelessly on to a bench and Harris followed 17

him into the washroom. There he watched as the Doctor vigorously scrubbed the blood off his hands.

The chief inspector took the opportunity to study the man who had appeared from beneath the pathologist's anonymous mask and gown. The Doctor's face moved through several, contortions as he worked at the pink stain on his hands. His was a face which never sat still, as if it were expressing a flowing river of colourful thoughts and ideas. He

was quite unlike any pathologist that Harris had encountered before.

‘Do you know what I would do if I were you, Chief Inspector?’ the Doctor said cheerfully, as he dried his hands.

Harris had no idea.

‘I’d start looking for a connection between the victims’ lovers,’ the Doctor continued, as he struggled into a tweed jacket before plonking a battered fedora upon his head. ‘A place where they all go, perhaps socially. Or where they have been in their recent past. I should be very interested to visit a place where one might meet a person who has no past. Sounds liberating, don’t you think?’

Harris considered this. He didn’t like the idea of a place like that at all.

‘Perhaps you’d like to help us find this place. Assist us, informally of course, with the inquiry?’

‘Chief Inspector,’ the Doctor said, as he adjusted his paisley handkerchief so it hung crazily from his breast pocket, ‘I thought you’d never ask.’

‘Won’t you be missed? You must have duties?’

‘I don’t think that will prove to be a problem. Sometimes I don’t think the staff even know that I work here,’ the Doctor added, grinning like a schoolboy.

Chief Inspector Harris said that he knew exactly what the Doctor meant.

It was nine o’clock by the time they left the hospital. The Doctor arranged to meet the chief inspector the following morning before taking his leave and heading back into the depths of Soho.

The sound of rock-and-roll being played with more enthusiasm than skill echoed through a quiet side street. The Doctor followed the sound to a small café squeezed between a drab pub and a grocery shop.

It took him a few minutes to order a cappuccino from the pasty-faced teenager behind the counter, as she was deeply engrossed in an intimate conversation with a young black man who kept leaning across the bar to steal kisses from her. The Doctor slid into a quiet

booth at the back and took a sip from the tannin-stained cup.

The café was one of many, usually short-lived, venues which Soho sprouted from time to time. Two serious-looking teenagers stood on a makeshift stage struggling through three-chord skiffle songs on cheap electric guitars. The 18

stage, like the rest of the café, was lit by candles. The proprietors had ripped up the linoleum floor replacing it with wooden boards and there were gashes on the wall where the previous fittings had been torn out. A jukebox stood neglected in the corner – clearly no one thought it cool enough to use.

The Doctor was the oldest person in the café by at least nine hundred years.

London's youth were flexing their muscles for the first time. Teen boys and teen girls were staking their claim, marking out their territory in the heart of the city. This was the first generation of youth to have money in their pockets and their very own shops to spend it in. Grown-ups were beginning to feel a little threatened by their children's hedonism and independence, although the Doctor knew that the happy mindlessness of this tiny nation's youth was going to be rudely shattered by the violence which was brewing even as they danced and kissed. This was London, 1958; the Notting Hill Riots were just around the corner and nothing was ever going to be the same again.

The Doctor offered a sympathetic smile to the teenagers who stared at him with expressions of open hostility, before turning his attention to the business at hand. He pulled the thick card envelope from one of his jacket pockets and spilt the contents out on to the table.

There were pitifully few items. Some coins, a small black wallet, a solitary key and half a packet of chewing gum. Earlier in the day they had been rattling around in the blond boy's pockets and now they were all that remained of his life. Absently, the Doctor slipped a stick of gum into his mouth and chewed slowly as he turned the items over in his hands.

He had been in two minds as to whether he should hand over the dead boy's possessions to Chief Inspector Harris. The Doctor felt a little guilty for robbing the police of their only lead; but on the other hand they were unlikely to make any progress on a case as unusual as this. He eased his conscience by telling himself that he would slip the

envelope back to the hospital the next day.

There was a photograph in the wallet. Two young men, sixteen or seventeen, standing together in the street. They had their arms around each other's shoulders and were squinting in the bright autumn sunshine. The Doctor recognized one of the boys as the murder victim, although in this picture his hair was dark. He was standing square on to the camera, looking confident and happy, as if he had everything that he wanted. The other boy looked a little younger, perhaps sixteen, with sandy-coloured hair. He was frowning and smiling at the same time. His smile was awkward, as if he were somehow expecting the worst.

The Doctor almost missed the address. It was written on the back of an Underground ticket which had been torn neatly in two.

JACK. 8 SILCHESTER ROAD. NOTTING HILL 4529.

Unlike the other untidy scraps of paper in the wallet, this ticket had been carefully tucked away as if it relayed more than just a piece of information.

As if it meant more to the wallet's owner than simply a name and an address.

The name of the worried-looking boy perhaps?

The Doctor gulped down the hot, gritty coffee and hurried out of the café, pausing only to raise his hat at the couple by the counter who were too busy kissing to notice him at all.

Jack Bartlett heard the door to the Fourth Magpie crash open, letting in a cold gust of night air. For what felt like the thousandth time, he glanced anxiously around hoping to see Eddy hurrying over, looking apologetic, with a tale of missed buses or having to work late.

It wasn't Eddy. A short man in a strange tweed jacket stood in the doorway shaking the rain from his umbrella. Jack turned back to his pint of M&B.

Where was Eddy? It wasn't like him to be late. In fact in the five weeks they had been seeing each other Eddy had always been early. More often it was Jack who turned up late and out of breath after hurrying down from the building site at Marylebone.

They had met outside Holborn library. Jack had been hurrying out guiltily, eager to be away from the librarian's penetrating gaze after borrowing two Oscar Wilde's and a James Baldwin. He had felt sure that the kindly-looking woman had been able to see straight into his mind: his choice of reading a window to the secrets hidden there. In his hurry to be away, he hadn't been paying attention to where he was going and had run straight into someone on their way in. He'd spluttered apologies as he tried to gather up his fallen books before the newcomer could see what titles he'd borrowed. The stranger had picked up *Giovanni's Room* before Jack had been able to retrieve it. Jack had immediately blushed beetroot.

Their eyes had met for the first time as they climbed to their feet. The dark-haired boy was so beautiful that Jack thought that he was going to be physically sick. Either that or just faint dead away. The boy was older than Jack, maybe seventeen or even eighteen, with dark blue eyes framed by long, black lashes.

'This is by that American, isn't it? The coloured writer?' The boy asked, looking from the book in his hands to Jack. He suddenly grinned conspirato-rially. 'It's meant to be a bit racy, isn't it?'

Jack had felt as if someone had just removed all of his clothes. He'd actually wrapped his arms around himself in an attempt to cover himself up. But the boy had just said that he hoped it lived up to its reputation, because he hated books which promised things that they didn't deliver. Then he had looked at Jack intently, meaningfully, for a moment, as if waiting for him to 20

say something. Jack was suddenly scared that this beautiful boy was going to turn around, walk away and that would be it. And from somewhere deep inside of himself, Jack had somehow found the courage to ask the dark-haired boy if he wanted to go for a coffee and Eddy Stone had said yes.

They had seen each other every day since that afternoon. And for Jack, even that didn't feel as if it were enough. Jack spent his days in the site office either staring into space or worrying that he was going to make some stupid blunder with Eddy and spoil everything. He barely got any work done, and had been twice reprimanded by the foreman for being late preparing the workmen's wage packets. He didn't care though, the only thing he cared about was Eddy.

But Eddy hadn't turned up tonight. Jack looked balefully around the pub lounge. The Fourth Magpie had lost a lot of its charm since it'd

been mod-ernized; the comfy settees and cut glass had been replaced with Formica and that new tubular furniture. Jack noticed that Madge, Eddy's boss, was in one of the booths surrounded by her usual entourage of fawning middle-aged men. They were all laughing, sharing some joke of Madge's. Madge often drank at the Fourth Magpie: Fred, the landlord, gave her free drinks. He liked having women in his pub, said that they brought respectability to the place.

Respectability and the guise of normality.

Jack had always felt intimidated by Madge. However, tonight his concern for Eddy overcame his usual inhibitions. Swilling the dregs of his fourth pint of beer, he climbed a little unsteadily from his stool at the bar and made his way over to the booth where Madge was holding court. She was in the middle of a story about her brief spell as a model back in the forties. 'It was always the same,' she was recounting, 'bikinis in winter and furs in summer. That's why I packed it in and concentrated on me hairdressing. Never knew whether I was coming or going.'

Her companions all nodded appreciatively, but Jack had heard them snipe about Madge behind her back too often to believe their sincere expressions.

Madge caught sight of him as he arrived at her booth. She sighed theatrically. 'If it isn't boy Bartlett. What do you want?'

Jack swallowed. 'I've been waiting for Eddy. He was meant to meet me after he finished work, but he hasn't shown up. I just wondered if. . . '

'Probably licking his wounds,' she said, and turned to her audience. 'I sacked the little sod this afternoon.'

'What?'

'You can tell Eddy Stone that he needn't come sniffing around for his job back either. I'll put up with a lot, but I'm not having my stylists mincing around my shop looking like girls.'

Jack couldn't understand what Madge was saying. 'You've sacked Eddy?

That's crazy. What did he do?'

‘As if you don’t know. Came to work with his hair bleached blond.’ Madge sneered, her companions exchanged disapproving glances.

‘You sacked Jack because he dyed his hair? I don’t believe it.’ Jack felt an anxious anger rise up through him. How could Madge have done such a thing? How could you sack someone for dying their hair? Jack felt a nagging worry that somehow this was all going to turn out to be his fault. Jack often teased Eddy that he usually fancied lads with fair hair and that Eddy was not his usual type at all. Had his teasing caused Eddy to get the sack?

Frustration and confusion got the better of him. ‘You stupid fat cow!’ Jack swore at Madge. ‘You’ve gone and spoilt everything.’ He swept the drinks on the table in front of him on to the floor with his arm.

Several things happened at once. Madge screamed and went to slap Jack around the face but missed, and only succeeded in knocking the rest of the drinks over; Fred the barman lunged for Jack while angrily informing him that he was barred for life; and the small man in the tweed jacket, whom Jack had seen enter earlier, suddenly appeared in the middle of the scene and shouted at the top of his voice: ‘Ladies and gentlemen, your attention please!’

Everyone was so shocked by this sudden intrusion that they stopped what they were doing and stared at him.

Impossibly, the little man produced a huge bunch of long-stemmed white roses from his sleeve. He handed the flowers to a bemused Fred, and bowed low. When no one applauded, the little man looked up, an expression of mock hurt on his face. ‘Ah, I see that you are a most discerning audience, unimpressed by such childish illusions. I shall have to win you over with my world famous disappearing chicken trick.’

The little man winked privately at Jack. With a flourish, he produced a rubber chicken from his right sleeve and threw it high into the air. Aiming his finger at the bird, he shouted, ‘One finger can be a deadly weapon!’ There was an ear-shattering explosion, the chicken disappeared in a ball of blinding scarlet fire, and customers of the Fourth Magpie were showered with hundreds of tiny chocolate eggs.

When the spots had cleared from their eyes, the regulars of the Fourth Magpie discovered that the little man had vanished, taking Jack Bartlett with him.

By the time the cab dropped them outside his lodgings in Notting Hill,

Jack had sobered up. The smog was thick tonight and he could only just make out the grubby front of his own house. Jack was wondering how he was going to get the Doctor passed old Mrs Carroway downstairs, when it occurred to him he hadn't told the Doctor where he lived.

Jack wanted to ask the Doctor how he knew his address, but the little man was caught up in an argument with the cab driver. From where Jack stood 22

it looked as if he was attempting to pay the fare with tiny faintly luminous cubes.

'What do you mean "You can't accept them"?' Jack heard the Doctor exclaim. 'I was assured they were legal tender on all the civilized planets in this Galaxy.'

The taxi driver must have tired of the argument because eventually he swore angrily at the Doctor and accelerated away, making a rude gesture out of the window as he went. The Doctor only raised his hat politely in response.

Jack couldn't help smiling. The little man was as mad as Lady Docker.

Jack couldn't quite remember leaving the Magpie or the journey back in the cab. He put his lapse of memory down to the beer. He wouldn't normally have accepted the lift, except the Doctor had said he wanted to talk to him about a mutual friend. From his tone, Jack had wondered whether the Doctor meant Eddy. Jack shivered, remembering the expression on the Doctor's face when he'd told him. He had looked awkward and embarrassed, like a policeman bringing bad news.

Having dealt with the taxi driver, the Doctor was walking over to Jack, preoccupied with putting his strange currency back into his pocket. For a moment Jack thought he saw a mischievous, self-congratulatory grin on the Doctor's face, as if the business with the cab fare had been a scam, like the magic trick in the pub. But then car lights in the smog behind the Doctor threw him into silhouette and Jack could only see the distinctive outline made by his hat and umbrella.

Jack tensed as the light behind the Doctor grew brighter. He heard the sound of a car engine, shrill and high. The driver would have to be a maniac to drive so fast in this weather. The Doctor appeared to be oblivious to the noise and Jack started towards him just as a car

hurtled out of the smog. A black cab. Heading straight for them.

Jack threw himself at the Doctor and together they crashed over the low wall that bordered Mrs Carroway's tiny front garden, collapsing amongst the unkempt shrubs.

Jack heard rather than saw the taxi hit the kerb, bounce crazily off it and hurtle away into the night.

The Doctor was on his feet in an instant. 'Road hog!' he exclaimed, clearing the wall in a single leap. He shook his fist at the now empty road, before turning excitedly back to Jack.

'Tell me,' he spluttered, waving his hands excitedly in front of him, 'did you notice anything strange about that vehicle?'

'What?' Jack rubbed a bruised knee. 'Beside the fact that it was trying to run us down – on the pavement?' Jack paused and thought for a moment –

there was something nagging at him. Something that wasn't quite right. That 23

was it.

'Do you mean that the light on top was the wrong colour?' he asked.

The Doctor shook his head impatiently, tapping a rhythm on his lips with his fingers. 'I was more concerned that there didn't appear to be anyone in the driving seat. The interior was entirely opaque. And I had the distinct impression that there wasn't anyone in that taxi at all.'

24

3

Half-A-Person

As the curtain fell for the final time that evening, the stage manager watched with mounting sadness as the star of the cabaret staggered from the stage to her dressing room.

How much longer can this go on? Jeffrey thought. The woman was visibly falling apart. Patsy Monette was a shadow of her former self. Her considerable stage presence was fading, and her full and sensuous voice had become weak and stretched since her husband's accident

earlier in the week. It was as if she were only half-a-person without him.

Jeffrey had always liked Patsy Monette and felt protective towards her. She, in turn, treated him with more respect than assistant stage managers could usually expect from the stars they serviced. She wasn't too bright of course, but with a face as pretty as hers that hardly mattered. Jeffrey had often heard her late husband boast that he liked his women that way. It was not without reason that the style magazines referred to her as England's Monroe. Not only was she beautiful, but she had an impish smile that always seemed to suggest that she had just managed to get away with something really improper.

The late Bob Burgess had exploited this, having her record old show classics and then milk even the slightest double-entendre in the lyrics for their every last innuendo. When Patsy Monette sang 'All of Me', it was no longer the appeal of a spurned lover but an invitation to bed. Unsurprisingly, the nation's youth had taken her straight to their hearts. Girls wanted to be like her, and boys just wanted her full stop.

However, Jeffrey suspected that this public infatuation might soon come to an end. Physically, Miss Monette looked terrible, and if the public became aware of her point-blank refusal to take time off and mourn her husband respectfully, her fortunes might well take a change for the worse.

The manager of the Top Ten Club had been in three times that week to see her show and there were rumours flying around that he was already looking for someone else to take top billing. Steeling himself for the task ahead, Jeffrey set off to try to warn the singer.

Jack's window opened, letting in a blast of night air and the Doctor, who was carrying a little boy in his arms. It was Dennis.

25

'I found him on the fire escape. Is he a friend of yours?'

Jack nodded, lifting the boy out of the Doctor's arms and laid him down on Mikey's bed. 'My roommate's little brother.'

Dennis's whole body was shaking violently. His dark brown eyes were glassy and unfocussed, his teeth chattered noisily. Dennis didn't appear to hear anything that was said to him. Jack looked up at the Doctor. 'What's the matter with him?'

‘Shock,’ the Doctor replied. ‘He needs to rest.’ He leant over the boy and gently touched his finger to Dennis’s forehead. There was a fizzing sound like a badly wired plug and Jack tasted a tang in the air, like electricity, and then Dennis relaxed into a deep sleep. It was as if the Doctor had just turned the little boy off like an electric train.

‘There,’ the Doctor said, as he tucked Dennis in. ‘He should sleep for a few hours.’

Jack watched as the Doctor carefully examined Dennis’s head and neck.

The Doctor probed the little boy’s throat with his fingertips, as if he were searching for something beneath the skin. Jack wondered whether he should stop the Doctor. After all, he didn’t really know anything about him. What would Mikey say if he came and saw the Doctor here? The little man didn’t look like a real doctor in his funny hat and clothes. He looked more like a magician or someone from the circus. Someone who travelled. But there was something about his hands. They moved over Dennis’s body with the keen but impassionate interest of a healer.

‘I didn’t thank you,’ the Doctor murmured, still intent on his examination.

‘What?’

‘For saving my life. Outside. You were very brave.’

‘Oh.’ Jack had never saved anyone’s life before. An embarrassed grin started to creep across his face. ‘You. . . you’re welcome.’

‘But please, please don’t do it again. You might get hurt, and I have too much blood on my hands as it is.’

Bemused and deflated by this remark, Jack looked away, the smile dying on his face. His eyes settled on the Doctor’s hands. There were reddish-brown stains framing his fingernails and shirtcuffs. It looked like. . .

‘Jack,’ the Doctor started, as his examination came to an end. He paused and took off his battered fedora, placing it carefully – no, *respectfully* – on the bed next to him. ‘Jack, I have some bad news for you.’

The front doorbell sounded. Saved by the bell, Jack thought. A voice

deep down inside of him was whispering that he really didn't want to hear whatever it was that the Doctor had to say. Jack swallowed down the anxious feelings that accompanied that thought, waved the Doctor into silence and hurried 26

to the door. In the gaps between the posts of the banister, he could see Mrs Carroway open the front door downstairs and let in. . .

Oh, no.

'Under the bed, quick.'

The Doctor opened his mouth to protest, but such was the panic on Jack's face that he allowed himself to be ushered under the other single bed in the room. A moment later there was a knock at the door. As he lay there in the dust, staring at the criss-cross of wire that formed the base of the bed, he was aware that Roslyn Forrester would have had a few arch comments to make about him being secreted away in a young man's bedroom.

He heard the door being opened and the heavy footsteps of a large man enter the room. From his low vantage point, he could only see the newcomer's black shoes and trouser bottoms. The man's voice was old and low. He said he had come to collect some money. The implied threat he made when Jack replied that he didn't have it suggested that the man was not from a bank or a reputable company. A loan shark? The instalment due sounded considerable and the Doctor wondered what Jack had needed the money for. The young man didn't seem to own much, the room he shared was barely furnished, and Jack's clothes were neither new nor expensive.

Well, he wasn't going to find the answers to his questions down here. Despite Jack's strange request for him to remain hidden, the Doctor was about to climb out from under the bed and ask, when he caught sight of a magazine tucked beneath the mattress – presumably by Jack. As he pulled it through one of the diamond-shaped gaps in the wire frame, a few small brown envelopes slipped from its pages.

The title of the magazine was *Physical Strength and Fitness*. The Doctor grinned. He'd forgotten how innocent mid-twentieth century Britain could be. It was a magazine for weight trainers. Most of the text was made up of dietary advice for those in training and excited reports of national competi-tions and championships – presumably included to encourage the dispirited.

However, the Doctor suspected that it was the pictures which had

attracted Jack to the title. They were all of young men exhibiting the results of the hard work they'd done in the gym. Some of the models had been photographed nude, but the publishers had discreetly superimposed black underwear over the offending parts of the photographs. To the Doctor, this coyness seemed somehow representative of the age.

There were some loose pages that had obviously been torn from other exercise magazines. Pictures of healthy looking young men flexing muscles and lifting weights. All of the models in the pictures had cherubic expressions and 27

golden hair. The Doctor was reminded of the boy who died at the hospital.

Reminded of the blood making pink streaks in the fair hair.

The envelopes, which had been secreted between the pages of the magazine, were all addressed to JACK BARTLETT, ESQ and also contained photographs. Or rather, the Doctor discovered after examining them, each contained a single copy of the same picture. From the grainy texture of the image it was clear that the picture had been taken from a distance, probably with a telephoto lens. The picture was of two young men sitting on a bench facing each other. Despite the poor quality of the photograph, the two men were easily identifiable. The blond boy, his hair dark in this picture, was reaching out to touch Jack's face.

There was something familiar about the envelope. A fault in the typewriter had meant that the 'Q' in 'ESQ' had been printed slightly lower than the other letters in the line. The Doctor had seen this before. When he'd called at the flat earlier that evening, there had been a similar letter for Jack on the sideboard in the hall. He'd noticed it while Mrs Carroway had been bitterly sounding off about the inadequacies of her tenant – three months behind with the rent and coming in at all hours from *those* pubs in the West End.

Jack's voice, raised in anger, brought the Doctor into the present. 'That's too much! I can't get my hands on that much. They're already asking questions at work. I've given you money this month. I just can't get any more.'

'I'm afraid,' the croaky voice rasped, not sounding afraid at all, 'that the interest on your debt has been increased. The people I represent are keen to make the most out of their investment. But they are not

greedy. They want just one more payment; if that isn't made they will be forced to take extreme action. Letters will be sent. Statements will be made. Public statements, if you catch my drift?'

The Doctor's face hardened. It wasn't a loan: Jack hadn't borrowed any money. It was extortion. Jack Bartlett was paying to keep the photograph secret. Paying to keep that touch, that moment in the park quiet. The photographs in the envelopes were to remind Jack of the blackmailer's hold over him.

The Doctor placed the envelopes back between the pages of the magazine and pushed it back into its hiding place in the folds of the exercise magazine.

The coyness of the magazine had suddenly lost its charm.

The Doctor climbed slowly and calmly out from under the bed. Jack's 'guest'

was a stooped, elderly man with rheumy eyes and a pinched, vicious face. On seeing the Doctor, the old man let out a whinny of laughter.

'Oh, I'm *so* sorry, I didn't realize that I was interrupting something.' He raised an eyebrow, somewhat theatrically. 'There's just no stopping you little devils, is there? I wonder if I should let my employers know about this little 28

liaison. They're always on the look-out for new clients. And who might you be, Mr?'

Jack shouted that it wasn't like that. The Doctor only calmly brushed the dust from his jacket with his hat.

'It's not Mr, it's Doctor, actually.'

The old man's lined face broke out into a grin, displaying a few yellowing teeth. 'It gets better and better. In our business we find that men who have much, are always willing to work that little bit harder to keep hold of what they've got.'

The Doctor reached into his jacket pockets and dramatically emptied their contents on the bed. Without looking at the debris, he said, 'Two apple cores, a catapult, fourteen inches of string, a cricket ball, twenty-three Arcturian pounds, the key to an obsolete blue telephone box and three gobstoppers –

one's half sucked. That's all I have in the world.'

The blackmailer looked at the Doctor as if he were mad. The Doctor continued, his voice measured and even. 'I don't have anything. No job, no employers for you to contact, no colleagues for you to whisper to. My doctorate is entirely my own invention. I am a traveller. I have no home here. No spouse and no children. I am not a member of the Rotary Club and the police do not know my name. In fact, I don't even have a name. Not any more.'

'You're lying,' the old man sneered, but he sounded unsettled in the face of the Doctor's calm sincerity. 'No one can live like that. Everyone's got something they're scared of losing, something they'll pay to protect. We'll find out all about you, don't you worry.'

The Doctor shrugged and leant forward on his red umbrella-handle. 'I am not worried. There's only one very small thing about you that interests me.

Your work must be very lucrative, am I right?'

The old man glanced at Jack and sniggered. 'Well, we can't complain.'

'I'm sure that you must have made a lot of money out of people, people who can't possibly refuse your demands. You can go on and on until you've drunk them completely dry, and even then there's nothing to stop you going through with your threat.'

The old man looked pleased that someone appreciated how powerful and clever he and his friends were. 'Oh we often expose people even after they've paid up. The publicity persuades anyone who might be thinking of refusing us to come around to our way of thinking.'

'That must prove to be most effective,' the Doctor commented. 'So why, if it is so successful, so perfect, are you letting this particular "client" off? It's this strange act of generosity that interests me.'

'What do you mean?'

'You said a moment ago that your employers only wanted one more payment from Jack. A large payment and earlier than usual. Why?'

The blackmailer narrowed his eyes. 'That's none of your business.'

‘Oh, everything is my business,’ the Doctor scoffed. ‘You’re letting him off because you know something. You know something about the other boy in the photograph. I’m right, aren’t I?’

The Doctor took a step forward and the old man nervously scuttled to the door. ‘You knew before you came here that something had happened or was going to happen to the boy in the picture.’

The old man slipped a hand around the door handle, preparing to leave.

‘Who are you?’ Beads of sweat appeared on his wrinkled brow. ‘How can you know all this?’

‘I’m the Doctor,’ he thundered. ‘And the answers to my questions are written in the fear on your face. You can give your employers a message. You can tell them that they are in trouble. You can tell them that they should expect a visit from me.’

With no answer to give to this, the old man just snarled a threat at the Doctor and left.

Closing the door after him, the Doctor’s mood changed dramatically. The darkness left his eyes and, suddenly filled with energy, he ran over to the bed and started to refill his pockets. ‘Right, that will have put the wind up him.

We’d better follow him to their lair while the trail’s still hot.’

When Jack didn’t answer him, the Doctor turned to find the boy staring at him.

‘He’s dead, isn’t he?’ Jack said quietly. ‘Eddy’s dead.’

For a moment there was silence.

‘Eddy. I didn’t know his name.’ The Doctor looked away for a moment, and then met Jack’s gaze and nodded. ‘Yes, I’m afraid he is dead. He was murdered earlier this evening. He was dying when I found him. I tried to save him but I. . . couldn’t.’

Jack sat down heavily on his bed and buried his face in his hands.

The Doctor could only stare down as the teenager was gripped by the first spasm of grief.

‘Bugger off! It’s members only!’

The indignant voice from the first floor of the building was quickly followed by three football supporters who hurried down the iron staircase, forcing Christopher Cwej to stand to one side to let them pass by on the narrow stairwell.

'Bitch!' One of the men spat venomously, but not loudly enough for the woman upstairs to hear. Chris watched them go, before gripping the rail and 30

continuing on his way up. He hoped that the proprietor remembered making her invitation.

The Tropics was on the first floor of a shabby town house on Dean Street –

one of the short roads which connected Soho to the main streets of London's West End. It had taken Chris a little while to find the place; the Tropics didn't advertise its presence and few of the houses on the street displayed their numbers. It was only by a process of elimination that Chris had finally located the club. The name had suggested something rather grand and colonial, but this was belied by the filthy, fire escape, surrounded by dustbins which had disgorged their sodden contents over the ground.

'Christopher, *deah*,' Tilda announced, as she caught sight of him. 'Drag that fabulous body of yours in here this instant. I have an undeniable urge to grab hold of a piece of it.'

Chris couldn't help grinning boyishly. He pulled off the trilby that the Doctor had selected for him from the TARDIS stores and entered the Tropics. Tilda was perched on a corner stool next to the door, smoking a filterless cigarette.

She reached up and pulled him towards her, kissing him lightly on either side of his face.

'Welcome to the Tropics. Welcome to my domain. You are in for a treat, I'm really most particular about who I let through that door.'

'I met three who didn't make it on the stairs.'

Tilda took a long drag on her cigarette and blew out a steady stream of blue smoke. 'Ergh, barbarians!' She leant closely to him and whispered conspira-torially, 'I have a suspicion that they thought this was a brothel. I mean, do I look like a working girl?'

Chris didn't understand the reference, and worried that he might make a *faux pas*, decided to say nothing.

Tilda narrowed her eyes. 'The correct answer, little Miss Cwej, is, "No".

Now go and get yourself a drink from Saeed or Andrew – whichever one of those dour queens is deigning to serve my punters at the moment – and I shall join you when you've settled in.'

The 'club' proved to be little more than two dimly lit rooms, cluttered with assorted chairs and tables. An upright piano stood in a corner of one room, another was dominated by the bar, from which one of Tilda's barmen served Chris with a glass of greasy Italian red wine. Despite Tilda's disparaging remarks, Saeed was friendly and attentive, asking Chris which gym he 'worked out' in and flattering him on his pectorals.

Chris settled at an empty table and spent a few moments people-watching.

The club was about half full, with an equal balance of men and women. The men wore suits, as did a few of the women, although most were wearing simple dresses adorned with floral patterns. Loud chatter filled the room.

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Chris looked up as Tilda joined him at the table – a wineglass in one hand, a bottle in the other.

'How do you like them?'

Chris was nonplussed.

'My punters. They're my life's work. Some people paint on canvas, others write for the stage. This is my art: the atmosphere that I create in my two little rooms.'

Chris realized that he must have looked unimpressed, because she added after a moment, 'Oh, I know they don't look like much but they're a marvellous mix. From titled folk to impoverished artists: all human life is here. Well, except for the dullards and the drearies – I really haven't any time for them at all.'

Chris looked again at the people in the bar, trying to see what could

be so special about Tilda's guests. His eyes fell upon a small, unremarkable-looking woman in a long coat talking quietly in a small group. 'What about her?' Chris said, describing the woman. 'Is she a great artist?'

'Ah, now she's new to me. I think she is with the art crowd. Drab little number, isn't she? Dreadful raincoat and poor skin. Probably one of those abstract expressionists. Yes, very abstract I should say.'

Tilda called over a friend to identify the woman for her. Tilda's opinion changed radically when she learnt that the woman in question was a young aristocrat and among the richest women in England. 'Really?' Tilda gasped, gazing back at the woman with new interest. 'Now that you say that, her complexion does seem more radiant and her hair has gained new lustre. Yes, very attractive number that little one. I shall have to have a little chat with her after I've dealt with Miss Cwej here.'

'Dealt with me?' Chris laughed. 'That sounds ominous. What did you have in mind?'

'Well to start with I should like to know everything about you,' Tilda said, her tone light and conversational as she refilled Chris's glass and poured a larger one for herself. 'You really are very different to most of the people around here. At first I thought you might be a labourer, but your hands are too soft and well-manicured for that. A boxer, then? But no, your pretty face hasn't taken that kind of punishment. A bodybuilder, perhaps?' Tilda leant back in her seat to appraise his impressive form. 'Possibly. But then I wondered why a body-builder would be hanging around Soho with. . . well with whatever your friend the Doctor turns out to be. I don't know quite what to make of you, young Christopher. You like girls, blonde ones particularly.'

Chris raised an eyebrow. 'Oh yes?'

'Oh yes,' Tilda continued. 'I've seen you giving a few of the women here the once over. You're less accustomed but not necessarily uninterested in the 32

attention of men – mind you, you completely missed Saeed's attempt to chat you up. And then there's your clothes. They look new and they're certainly expensive, but they're twenty years out of date.' She raised her glass in a toast. 'You interest me strangely, Christopher Cwej, and frankly, few men of your age do.' She drained her glass and added, 'So tell me?'

‘Tell you what?’

‘Everything.’

‘Can’t a girl get any peace?’ Patsy Monette’s disembodied voice wailed from the other side of her dressing-room door. Jeffrey waited for a moment and then opened the door, only to close it hurriedly to avoid being struck by a low-flying stiletto.

Jeffrey sighed and knocked on the door.

‘Leave me alone,’ she yelled. There was a slight pause before the singer added, more reasonably, ‘Unless, you’ve something to drink.’

Patsy Monette glanced up at the mirror in front of her as Jeffrey slipped into the room, guarding his face with his arm, ready to fend off any more airborne shoes. On seeing who it was Monette’s expression slipped from mild interest to tired dismay.

‘Oh, it’s you,’ she slurred, turning away. ‘Whatever it is that you want, the answer is no. Now be a good little boy and call me a cab. I want to get home.’

The singer slumped back in her chair and started to dab unenthusiastically at her stage make-up with a tissue.

Jeffrey watched Patsy Monette as she worked. The young woman was a complete mess. She hadn’t even bothered to change out of her sequined stage costume; just wrapping a grubby dressing gown around herself. Even the thick pancake make-up couldn’t hide the dark rings under her eyes. Her face was drawn and her usually perfect skin was coated in a light dusting of pimples.

Yet there was something deeply appealing about her vulnerability, and secretly Jeffrey wanted nothing more than to take her home and look after her.

She rummaged in her purse for a couple of tablets and swallowed them down with the dregs of a gin and tonic. It hurt Jeffrey to see her being so self-destructive.

‘I wish you’d ease up on those,’ he started, but Patsy cut him off sharply.

‘Are you still here?’ she complained, swivelling around in her chair to stare fiercely at him. ‘It’s bad enough that everyone else is moaning on

at me without you having a go as well. Oh and do stop looking like a kicked puppy or I shall be forced to thump you one. Something – I feel I must warn you – that will give me a great deal of pleasure. Didn't I tell you to get me a cab?'

She rooted through her dressing-gown pockets, pulled out a half-eaten chocolate bar and bit off a chunk. 'Christ, I need a drink!' she exclaimed 33

with passion.

'You need to rest,' Jeffrey blurted out, unable to stop himself. 'You should take some time off. It's ridiculous putting yourself through this. There's no reason for it. No one will think any less of you if you took a holiday after. . . '

Jeffrey paused, realizing what he was about to say. 'Well, after what you've been through.'

'Hah!' Patsy shouted dramatically, and clambered to her feet. 'You think I care what anyone thinks?' She pulled her favourite black cocktail dress down from where it hung behind the door.

'Turn around,' she ordered and started to struggle out of her costume. Jeffrey automatically obeyed. 'They can go to hell for all I care. But I won't leave my audience, they're all I have.'

She pulled her short fur jacket over her cocktail dress. In a quieter voice, she said, 'I doubt that you could understand, but now that Robert is gone. . . '

She paused and took a deep breath. 'Now that he is gone for ever, the punters are all I have. Without them. . . well, I wouldn't last a week.' She chuckled hollowly. 'And they aren't enough. Not nearly enough.'

'I. . . I don't know what you mean,' Jeffrey managed. The singer wasn't making any sense. Was she ill? Certainly he'd never seen her so pale and drawn. Patsy's skin seemed translucent, as if somehow she was physically fading away. Jeffrey shuddered.

'Look, just think about taking some time off. The producer's been in to see the show three times this week. There are rumours going around that he's putting feelers out, looking for another singer to head the bill. He's worried about the bad publicity.'

The telephone interrupted them. Patsy snatched it up, listened intently

for a few moments, and then spoke a man's name out loud, obviously repeating it back to the person on the other end of the line.

'I'll be right there,' she said, and slammed the receiver down.

And then she smiled, her old wicked smile. And Jeffrey realized that he hadn't seen her smile since Robert Burgess had died.

'Do you know,' she laughed, looking genuinely relaxed, 'I think I may take some time off after all. Call me that cab, I'm going to the club.' She buttoned up her fur, stuffed the last chunk of chocolate into her mouth and headed for the door.

Jeffrey watched her go, open-mouthed. What on Earth was going on? Who had been on the other end of the telephone? And what had they done to drag the singer from the depths of depression in such a short time? As Jeffrey picked up the telephone to call a cab, he recalled the name that Patsy had spoken on the phone – she'd repeated it very carefully, as if she had been 34

committing it to memory. It was an uncommon name; Jeffrey couldn't decide whether it was foreign or not. He tried saying it out loud, experimentally.

'Kwedge. Christopher Kwedge.'

Gordy Scraton was a man with plans. Big plans. As he stood on the balcony overlooking the busy dancefloor of his nightclub, he thought about the future and smiled greedily to himself. The nightclub was a nice little earner and provided a cover for his more serious 'business' ventures, but it was still peanuts when compared to what he knew he was destined for.

Since his older brother's death in the summer, Gordy had inherited the position of head of the family business. No small task for a young man of twenty-six, especially when the family trade was extortion, blackmail and unlicensed gambling. But Gordy had his sights set higher than ordinary crime, for Gordy knew that he was special. After all, he thought, how many men had cut a deal with the devil himself?

Gordy chuckled as he walked from the noisy club into the quieter office at the back of the building. His office housed a large desk from which he liked to give orders to the few men remaining in his employ. The desk had belonged to his late brother, Albert. It was made of a dark wood and smelt old.

When Gordy sat behind it he remembered his brother and he felt powerful and important. He liked that feeling.

But he didn't sit down at his desk tonight. Instead he ran his fingers along the lip of the desktop until he located a small switch. Behind him, in the corner of the room, part of the wall silently fell away to reveal sharp wooden steps leading down into the darkness. Taking an electric torch from an otherwise empty desk drawer, he slipped down the steps and into the room below.

The room was small, cold and damp. The only light came from the torch in his hand. Gordy didn't like to admit it, even to himself, but he was secretly terrified every time he came into his little shrine. He was always frightened when the devil appeared before him; but he was more scared that one night the voice wouldn't answer his call and he would be left alone.

He knelt before a small altar he had fashioned himself out of a wooden crate and an old drape. He began to murmur the now familiar incantation under his breath. On top of the altar, the large glass sphere sat dark and lifeless, waiting patiently for him to finish. He stumbled through the prayer self-consciously, fearful of being found kneeling in the dark, whispering to himself.

He sighed audibly as the glass ball on the wooden crate in front of him began to shine with an eerie emerald light. Gordy stared deep into the glass, watching the intricate flames which flickered and whirled inside.

'I've done what you told me,' he whispered, his face so close to the glass that his warm breath left patches of moisture behind as he spoke. 'I sent Carl 35

to see to the boy – just like you told me.' The globe didn't respond; Gordy carried on anxiously. 'Carl will do the job, you don't have to worry on that score. He'll be back soon, you'll see.'

There was a long pause, and then the crystal ball sighed with evident pleasure, reminding Gordy of a cat stretching after a nap by the fire. When it spoke its voice was a deep and melodic whisper.

'There will be others,' it breathed. 'There will be many others.'

Gordy swallowed. 'What about the things you promised me, you said –'

The voice from the centre of the fiery ball cut him short. ‘ *I said,* ’ it started sharply, clearly annoyed, making Gordy flinch. Then it restrained itself, its tone becoming softer and more conciliatory. ‘I said that if you lay down and serve me then all the riches of this city and many more will be yours. But before that there is work to be done.’

Gordy wanted those riches now. Riches he could use to build his business, hire more men to work for him, until he owned every square inch of the West End. Then he’d show all those that had doubted that he could run the firm after his brother had died.

A noise on the wooden stairs brought him quickly to his feet.

‘Who’s there?’ he cried, hating the fear that had gripped his voice. Gordy relaxed as his younger brother padded into the room, illuminated by the soft green light.

‘Carl! You almost scared me half to death. You know you’re not to come down here.’

Gordy ushered his brother back up the stairs and then followed him out, taking one last look back down into the room before he closed the concealed door. The fire in the glass sphere had died, returning the little room into an impenetrable blackness. The devil had gone, returned to whatever place was its home.

‘Well,’ Gordy demanded, expectantly, ‘how’d it go?’

Carl sniggered. An ugly sound, even to Gordy, that threatened to slide into hysteria. Gordy took hold of his brother by his arms. You had to treat Carl gently, information had to be teased out of him piece by piece. Gordy loved his younger brother dearly, and yet even he had to admit that Carl infuriated him. He knew that the men who were still willing to work for Gordy joked about Carl, about how he was different. They said that he was backward and slow. They never said it to Carl’s face though, they feared his skill with a razor too much for that.

‘The boy – Dennis. Did you see to the boy, like I told you?’

Carl looked away. When he spoke there was a nervous tone in his voice, like a child who thought he was about to be punished. ‘Someone came. They got in the way.’ And then he started to giggle again. ‘So I did him instead.’

Gordy's eyes opened widely in panic at this news. 'Who? Who'd you kill?

For Christ's sake, Carl! This isn't a game. The police are crawling all over Soho as it is. I don't need more bloody investigations.'

Carl stretched out his hands, offering a little blood-soaked bundle to his brother. 'Don't worry, Gordy. It was Eddy Stone, that boy hairdresser. He came sticking his nose in, just as we was about to see to the boy. It's OK

though, Gordy, innit? I mean he was next on the list anyway? I just got 'im early, that's all.'

Carl dropped the stained parcel into his brother's cupped hands. Carefully, Gordy unwrapped the piece of material and smiled as he saw what was revealed there. He tucked the parcel away in his desk, and then gently wrapped his brother up in an embrace. Carl closed his eyes, leant his head against his Gordy's chest and smiled with contentment.

'Don't worry Carl, you've done well, you've done us proud.' Gordy hugged his brother tightly, imagining the riches that would surely soon be theirs.

'Nothing's gonna stop us now. No one can even touch us.'

Chris tucked his scarf into his collar and pulled his anachronistic hat down on his head. The trilby was typical of the Doctor: right century, wrong decade.

And it was always the little things that people noticed. Tilda certainly had; picking up not only on his clothes but his accent and phrasing. Initially he had been flattered by her interest, but he'd quickly become a little unsettled by the barrage of questions she'd fired at him. He'd been left feeling as if he were attending a job interview, and had decided to slip away when Tilda excused herself to make a telephone call. He'd waved goodbye from the top of the stairs and made his exit.

It was good to be back on the street, although the autumn night was cold and the smog gave a stale taste to the air, almost like sulphur. He spent a moment getting his bearings. To his left were the brighter lights of Old Compton Street, which would lead him back to the TARDIS, and home. A black cab was pulling up on the far side of the road as he left the Tropics.

Chris paused to watch as an attractive young blonde woman wearing a fur clambered drunkenly from it and rummaged through her handbag for the fare.

She wore a childlike frown of concentration across her face as she swayed in the middle of the road, oblivious to all else as she counted out her money.

Chris sighed to himself. Was everyone in 1950s England a drunk?

The smog in the street reduced visibility to only ten or fifteen metres, so Chris heard rather than saw the car. His long love affair with motor vehicles of all kinds alerted him to the speed the car was travelling when he first heard its strained engine. He felt himself move into policing mode, making a series 37

of judgments about distance and speed. And he was already running forward when the vehicle's head-lamps lit up the smog like a cloud in a lightning storm.

Chris sprinted across the street and, barely breaking his stride, threw his arm around the blonde woman's waist and pushed her into the back of her taxi as a dark shape hurtled past them. There was the sharp screech of tearing metal as the door of the stationary taxi was ripped off its hinges by the speeding car, then bounced and skittered across the road.

Chris found himself lying on top of the young woman on the floor of the cab. In spite of her brush with death, she was looking up calmly at him, an amused expression on her face.

'Hello you,' she said, arching a painted eyebrow. 'Well what's on your mind?

As if I didn't know.'

Chris, who had been expecting her to be shocked, relieved or at least grateful to be alive, found himself momentarily lost for words.

The noise had brought a few of the Tropics' patrons out on to the street.

Leading the way was Tilda, who, ignoring the shocked and angry cries of the cab driver, poked her head into the back of the taxi where Chris and Patsy lay in their uneasy embrace.

‘Well I can see that formal introductions are going to be a little unnecessary.

I’m pleased that you’ve managed to break the ice, *deahs*, but why not come upstairs and have a drink with Mother before you go any further?’

Jack pulled the drawstrings of his duffel bag tightly closed and sat back down on his bed. It had taken him less than five minutes to pack the few possessions that mattered enough to take with him. He’d sold his watch and his bicycle to pay the blackmailer’s first demand. He’d naively thought that they’d stop when he didn’t have anything left. But the old man had just smiled and told him that he’d have to find a way to get more. So Jack had stolen from work to meet the next payment, and the next, and the next. And he’d done it all to keep Eddy out of trouble. To keep what they had safe. To keep it secret.

He should be upset, crying or something. But every time he thought about Eddy he just felt numb.

Jack decided to sit and catch his breath for a minute before he headed off.

He wasn’t exactly sure where he was going to go. He had a vague idea that he would make for the coast. Portsmouth or maybe Southampton. He had twenty quid on him. Enough, he felt sure, to buy himself a job as a steward on a ship sailing to France. That ought to be far enough, oughtn’t it? he thought to himself. Far enough to keep himself out of the hands of the blackie and the Law.

He couldn’t stay here. The police would be around soon enough. Then it would all come out. They’d find out about the blackie and the money he’d 38

been quietly pilfering from work every Friday. They would find out about the money and they would find out about the photograph. They would find out about him.

‘I can’t stay and face the Law,’ he’d told the Doctor. ‘I’ll end up spilling the gaff, I know I will.’

He would as well. Once they got you into one of their cells you didn’t stand a chance. Jack had heard all the stories from the older men who drank at the Magpie. Stories about those who’d been unlucky enough to be caught in a lay or a park. It wasn’t just the beatings, although they did beat you of course. It was the letters they wrote to your

family, the visits they made to your workplace, and the publicity of the trial. Jack had heard of three men who'd hanged themselves rather than have to face the court and see their names printed in the papers.

It wasn't going to be him. If he started running now, then maybe he could outrun the lot of them. Maybe he could leave the whole mess far behind.

The police, the blackmailers, the missing money. All of it. He could travel to France and start again. He could get a job in Paris, learn French – if he kept his head down they'd never find him. He could just hide for ever. With Eddy gone, there wasn't anything left to stay for. Nothing left to protect.

Jack swallowed. How had this happened to him? How had his life become so screwed up?

It's too late for thoughts like that, Jack Bartlett, he told himself. Far too late.

But there was something nagging at him. Something that the Doctor had said before he'd left. A something that was preventing him from climbing out of the window, down the fire escape and getting away. It was after the Doctor had told him that Eddy was dead. The Doctor had sat beside him, placed a hand on his shoulder.

'We can stop them, you know,' the little man had said. 'The people who killed your friend. The people who killed Eddy. You and I, together, are quite a match for all their bullying and wickedness. But I can't do it alone or perhaps I'm not willing to. You'll have to help me.' And then the Doctor had gone. 'A quick reconnaissance,' he'd said. 'Won't be long.'

The idea was ridiculous. How could the two of them stop the blackmailers?

How could he and the Doctor catch Eddy's murderer alone? It was a stupid, impossible idea. But something about the quiet in the Doctor's voice had appealed deeply to him. He'd felt his racing heartbeat slow as he'd listened to the Doctor's gentle Scots burr, almost hypnotized by its comforting softness.

And he had felt hope, for the first time since that terrible day when the blackmailer's first letter had fallen on his mat. He'd felt that maybe he could do something after all.

No. It was too dangerous. *His* plan was better. Safer. He'd walk into town 39

tonight and then hitchhike to the coast. He felt better after having made the decision. It stirred him into action. He pulled on his donkey jacket, swung his bag on to his shoulder and, after whispering goodbye to the room which had been his home for the last year, pulled back the curtain and reached for the window catch.

Jack froze when he saw the face grinning, goofishly, back at him through the glass, feeling as if he'd been caught in some terrible act. The Doctor was standing on the fire escape, gesturing excitedly at Jack through the glass. Jack turned slightly to hide the incriminating duffel bag on his shoulder from view as he pulled up the window.

'I've tracked our elderly friend to his lair,' the Doctor said, his words tumbling out chaotically in his enthusiasm to share his news. 'A nightclub in Soho.

Does the name "Ritzys" mean anything to you?'

Jack shook his head. 'That's great,' he said, trying to sound as if he meant it.

The Doctor must have heard the uncertainty in his voice. He paused for a moment, and then caught sight of the bulging bag on Jack's shoulder.

'If you're still interested, that is?'

The roof of Ritzys nightclub was long and flat, its surface broken only by small skylights which protruded turret-like from its surface. The sound of a band playing skittle tunes on the dancefloor down below reverberated through the roof. Jack could feel the beat through the soles of his shoes.

He pulled his jacket tightly around himself: the roof offered no protection from the rain which had begun to fall in earnest. What was he doing here?

He must be out of his mind.

If the Doctor felt the rain he didn't show it. Jack watched from the edge of the roof as the little man scampered between the skylights, peering into each for a moment only to move on to the next. When he'd evidently found what he was looking for, he called Jack over.

The skylight looked down on to an office at the back of the club. Through the glass Jack caught sight of the old man who had visited him earlier in the evening. He was standing in front of a desk, behind which sat a young man with a crew cut, wearing a sharp, black suit. Their voices were raised in anger, but the beat of music below and the rhythm of the rain on the glass obscured their words.

Suddenly, the rooftop was plunged into darkness. For a second Jack was disorientated and scared. Had they been discovered? But it was only that the two men had left the room below, turning the light off after them.

'Are you up for a bit of breaking and entering?' the Doctor asked.

Jack stared at him. 'You're not serious?'

40

The Doctor took a small Swiss Army knife out of one of his jacket pockets and slipped it between the skylight and the frame.

Oh blimey, Jack thought. He is serious.

'Ah,' the Doctor breathed with satisfaction. He pushed the skylight, and it swung quietly open. 'We're in.'

Against his better judgment Chris had allowed himself to be dragged back into the Tropics. Tilda had insisted that he needed to rest after all the excitement, and had demanded that he allow her to offer him a bottle of her finest Italian wine. 'It's the absolute least I can do after you saved my dearest and favourite friend,' she had exclaimed. 'Patsy is like a daughter to me.'

Chris would have preferred an orange juice, but when he had requested one Tilda had thrown back her head and burst out laughing, asking him if the accident hadn't done some permanent damage to his brain. And so, Chris had found himself sitting in a corner of the Tropics surrounded by Patsy, Tilda and a few of her extremely drunk customers, drinking more wine than he would have usually cared to.

In other circumstances he would have probably entered into the spirit of the evening. But his grief had left him with little of the energy necessary to socialize and make new friends. Chris quietly began to regret not having returned to the TARDIS with the Doctor. His companion was probably fast asleep by now, or whatever Time Lords did when the rest of the Universe tucked itself up in bed.

The Tropics was heaving with people, voices raised in laughter and conversation. Cigarette smoke hung in the air, irritating Chris's throat and reminding him inevitably of Roz, whose smoking had been the cause of much friction between them. Before he was plunged into that particular train of thought, he was distracted by Tilda trying to enlist his aid in convincing Patsy to take a turn at the piano.

'She's an absolute star, Christopher. Tell her that you want to hear her sing.'

Chris found himself being stared at expectantly by Patsy. He'd been trying to minimize his contact with the young woman. She'd been flirting rather ostentatiously with him ever since he'd saved her outside the club. Despite her good looks, he didn't find her remotely attractive. There was something flat about her. That was it, Chris realized: she lacked any depth whatsoever, as if she were made of only two dimensions instead of three.

She leant over and whispered, 'I'd love to sing a song for you.'

'I'd. . . be delighted,' Chris managed.

'Good,' Tilda barked, 'that's settled then.' She gestured over to Andrew, who had replaced Saeed behind the bar. He stepped out from behind the makeshift 41

table and walked directly over to the piano, casually abandoning several customers who were still waiting to be served. As he played the first few bars of a song, a hush fell over the Tropics. The queue at the bar dissolved as the customers hurried back to their friends. The crowd turned to the makeshift stage, and waited expectantly. Tilda dimmed the already low lighting, adjusting a single desk lamp so it became an impromptu spotlight over the piano.

Patsy took a moment to reapply her lipstick, and then took up her place at the pianist's side. She looked almost bleached out in the harsh light of the lamp. Quietly, stumbling over some of the words, and always slightly out of time with the piano, she began to sing.

Not a day

I wouldn't last a single day

Without your tender love

My dear

Chris felt himself flush as she directed the sentiment of the song over to the corner of the room where he sat. He turned his attention to the crowd, who were watching the performance with an intensity that Chris found unsettling.

Some of the customers were singing along quietly, others just silently mouthed the words. A young man slipped his arms around his girlfriend, wrapping her up in a protective embrace.

Can't you see?

I'm

Nothing,

Without you.

The words of the song slipped past his defences and mercilessly prodded his grief. He remembered the afternoon in the English village of Little Caldwell when he'd held Roz in his arms, her sinewy body feeling strangely fragile in his embrace. She'd whispered words then that he'd never forgotten.

I need you. Don't ever doubt that.

Tears welled up in his eyes just as anger and resentment twisted his guts.

Well I need you Roz. Why did you have to go and leave me? How am I supposed to go on without you?

He glanced awkwardly around him, surreptitiously wiping his eyes. Besides Tilda, who was entirely absorbed in the performance, he was the only 'single'

person in the strange club. Chris leant back in his chair, trying to put some distance between himself and the atmosphere in the room. It felt as if he were no longer in a bar at all, but at church. This was more of a religious service than a cabaret. He turned to look at Patsy again, just as she was hesitantly 42

bringing the song to a close. For a moment their eyes met, and then the song ended and she turned to applaud her pianist politely.

Tilda had left her seat across from him and had returned to her stool by the door. She was talking to a scruffy-looking girl of no more than

thirteen.

Despite the girl's age, Chris could tell from their body language that the conversation was adult and serious. Tilda slipped a few coins into the girl's hand, before returning to her seat next to Chris.

'We've got trouble.'

Chris leant forward, interested in anything that might distract him from the pain in his stomach. 'What sort of trouble? Police?'

Tilda shook her head, dismissing the idea. 'Oh, no. I don't get any trouble from Lilly Law. And I bloody well shouldn't either. Not with the charitable donation that I make to the retirement fund of a certain sergeant every week.

No, I've just had word from a very reliable friend that some of the less attractive residents in the area are out to cause mischief this evening.'

Chris found Tilda's speech patterns exasperating. 'Do you mean criminals?'

'Hah! Criminals would be flattering them. They are thugs, Christopher, plain and simple. They take advantage of. . . well, of the informal organization of clubs like mine.'

He frowned. 'You mean they operate a protection racket?'

'Quite. All the clubs that refuse to pay for their own particular brand of protection have been warned to expect trouble from the Scraton gang.'

'Gang? How organized are they?'

'When dear old Albert Scraton was alive, very little happened around these parts without his say-so. But that old psycho shuffled off this mortal coil last summer to wherever it is that villains go when they die.'

'Assassinated?'

'Good heavens, Christopher!' Tilda exclaimed, her cigarette falling from her lips. 'This is Soho, not Chicago. He died of a heart attack. His younger brother Gordy runs the show now. Or tries to, at least. Not much upstairs unfortunately. Or rather, fortunately for us.'

'And they're on the rampage this evening?'

‘So rumour has it. To be honest I’m not that worried for the Tropics. We’re too well in with the law. I doubt that little Gordy would dare come flexing his tiny muscles around here. I’m more concerned about the smaller clubs.

My dear friend, the Major, runs a little one-roomer around the corner. You wouldn’t be an absolute angel and pop around with a message, would you?’

Chris drained his glass and smiled, pleased to find a natural way of bringing the evening to a close. ‘I can do it on my way home.’

‘You’re an absolute love,’ Tilda exclaimed, and kissed him firmly on the lips.

‘Patsy’ll show you the way.’

He opened his mouth to object, but Tilda was already waving the singer over.

‘Would you like to do the honours?’ The Doctor asked, handing Jack a box of matches. Jack struck one as the Doctor pulled a clean white handkerchief from his trouser pocket, and dangled it above the flame until it began to smoulder.

Jack took the hanky from the Doctor as flames spread across it, and quickly let it drop into the wastepaper bin before it could burn his fingers.

Jack felt a surge of relief as the letters and photographs in the wastepaper bin curled and blackened with the heat. For the first time since the blackmailing began he felt safe. No, more than just safe. He felt human again. Powerful and whole. He knew that these feelings were tied up with the Doctor. Jack wouldn’t have dreamt of following the old man if the Doctor hadn’t suggested it. He certainly would never have broken into the blackmailer’s hideout. Not in a million years. Somehow the impossible became possible when the Doctor was around. Or at least the unthinkable became a viable alternative.

Not for the first time Jack thought of asking the Doctor who he was, where he came from. But he dismissed the questions just as quickly as they formed.

The Doctor’s presence in his life felt fragile, as if he might disappear

as quickly and as completely as he had arrived. Jack didn't want to do anything that might push the Doctor away.

The flames started to rise out of the top of the bin. Jack's eyes watered as the smoke began to fill the small cellar. The Doctor had found the secret room after searching the office above. He'd toured the perimeter of the room tapping the walls lightly until a hollow sound had revealed the existence of a concealed door. Jack had felt a thrill of excitement as he'd entered the passage. The Doctor behaved as if it were the sort of thing he did every day.

The Doctor had made light work of the small commercial safe they'd found in the corner. Letters, envelopes and photographs were neatly stacked and labelled on each of the shelves inside. Jack had been sorely tempted to take a voyeuristic glimpse at a few of the photographs, but the Doctor had quickly emptied the contents of the safe into the wastepaper bin. There was a revolver next to the papers at the back of the safe. Jack had never seen a real gun before. He'd reached out to touch it and had felt the cold metal under his fingers for a second before the Doctor had slapped his hand away.

'Leave it,' he'd said, his voice cold and hard.

'I only wanted to look at it,' Jack had complained, rubbing his stinging fingers and feeling a little hurt.

'Looking is one thing,' the Doctor had chided before wandering off to explore the rest of the room.

44

The Doctor now returned from examining a large glass globe like an outsized crystal ball, which sat on a small table at the other side of the room.

He was tapping his lip lightly with the handle of his umbrella, his other hand gripped his lapel. To Jack, the Doctor looked like a school teacher deep in thought.

'It's over,' Jack whispered to him, as the flames started to shrink back in the metal wastepaper bin, leaving only smouldering ashes. 'I'm safe.'

'I wish I could share your certainty, but I rather suspect that the end is further away than we think.'

‘What do you mean? We’ve destroyed all the evidence, haven’t we?’

‘What? Oh, yes. The blackmailer’s hold over you and all their other victims is gone.’ The Doctor nodded, hurriedly. ‘We can talk about this later. We should leave now. There’s no sense in hanging around here waiting to get caught.’

‘Bit late for that, I’m afraid,’ a new voice said, before letting out a high pitched giggle.

A man was standing at the bottom of the stairs. He was young, in his early twenties. His face was thin, emphasizing his prominent cheekbones. Large eyes stared unblinkingly at them from below a high forehead. Even in the fading light from the fire, Jack noted that his Brylcreamed hair was fiery red.

A livid wound ran down one cheek. It looked fresh, still smudged with blood.

Jack noticed all of this in the tiny moments before his attention was violently arrested by the cut-throat razor which the man held delicately between his forefinger and thumb.

‘Right,’ the scarred man said, his voice bright with enthusiasm. ‘Who’s first?’

4

At Your Own Risk

‘I’ve had a shave today, thank you,’ the Doctor quipped, but Jack could see that his expression was grim. ‘And I doubt my young friend here needs one.’ The Doctor stepped forward and moved in front of Jack, putting himself between the two men.

The scar-faced man advanced on them. ‘That’s all right, ’cos I ain’t no barber.’

‘Really? Then you should put the razor away. There might be an accident.’

The man looked with genuine affection at the knife in his hand. ‘That’s the general idea,’ he added, and giggled softly.

‘You don’t have to try to hurt us,’ the Doctor said, suddenly serious.

‘You can just let us go. There’s nothing to be gained from harming us. We’ve already destroyed your blackmailing operation. It’s over.’

The man stepped forward until he was only a few feet from the Doctor. The embers of the fire lit the young man’s face from below, making his features look skeletal in the halflight. ‘I don’t have to hurt you. Oh, I should, I know.

My brother won’t tolerate anyone interfering in his affairs. Particularly not filthy little queers like you. But that’s not why I’m going to stick my knife into you. I’m gonna do that just ’cos I want to, that’s all. ‘Cos it’ll give me a thrill.’

And then he moved. Quickly. Too quickly for Jack to see the whole movement. The arm that held the knife arched down towards the Doctor. The blade slicing the air close to his throat.

The Doctor dropped into a fighting stance, knees slightly bent and arms protecting his face. Stepping forward, he swept his left arm out in front of him, blocking the attack. In one movement, the Doctor spun one hundred and eighty degrees, crouching slightly until he was under the thug. He tucked his hip into the man’s groin and straightened his leg quickly. The power of this movement was more than enough to send the ginger-haired man sailing over the Doctor’s shoulder, to land on his back on the hard cellar floor.

‘Venusian hip throw,’ the Doctor explained as if he were instructing a class at a dojo. ‘It’s actually designed for people with five arms, but it’s still effective on those of us who have to get by with two.’ He reached for Jack’s arm. ‘Come on, let’s get out of here.’

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The ginger-haired man had climbed quickly to his feet and moved to the stairs, blocking the only means of escape. He looked shaken, clearly not expecting the little man to put up such a struggle, but he was unhurt.

‘You don’t get away from me that easily.’

The Doctor directed Jack towards the far wall of the cellar. Jack backed away quickly until he was standing by the little table. He was relieved to be out of the action. He hadn’t been involved in a fight since junior school and felt completely out of his depth.

Twice more the ginger-haired man attacked. The first time the Doctor

tripped him as he lunged, and he sprawled at the Doctor's feet, swearing loudly. Just as in the first attack, once the man hit the floor the Doctor disengaged, stepping back and allowing him to clamber to his feet. The Doctor had the opportunity to really hurt the man once he was on the ground, but instead he waited patiently for his adversary to climb to his feet and attack again.

The third and final time that the scar-faced man attacked, the Doctor's mar-tial arts didn't help him. He applied a painful-looking wrist-lock, but the ginger-haired man managed to pull an arm free and brought his elbow crashing into the Doctor's stomach. The Doctor folded over, winded. As he gasped for air, the thug kicked him to the ground.

This time the scar-faced man didn't waste time with boasts or threats. He dived on to the Doctor, straddling him, and started to pummel his head with his fists. The Doctor squirmed beneath him, trying to protect his face from the increasingly savage blows.

'Jack!' he shouted, his voice muffled by his hands. 'Jack, please.'

Jack stared at the horrifying scene playing out in front of him. He wanted to run past them, up the stairs and get out of this place. Suddenly he couldn't believe that he had been persuaded to come here in the first place. He fought an absurd impulse to go and kneel next to the Doctor and apologize for being so useless. But he didn't. Instead he picked up the glass ball from the low table and walked quickly and certainly over to the fight. The globe was heavy, the glass felt thick and strong. Jack lifted it high into the air and then brought it down on the ginger-haired man's head. He felt the globe crack beneath his hands and the thug toppled across the Doctor, blood escaping from a long, shallow cut on the crown of his head.

'Stop!' Light flooded the room from the top of the stairs. Jack was forced to blink as his eyes adjusted. A man was silhouetted in the doorway to the office. 'Put it down.' The voice screamed again, 'Now. Put it down now.'

It was the crew-cut man they had spied upon from the roof. His eyes were full of fear and panic. He edged into the room, as if afraid that any sudden movement would cause Jack to drop the globe. 'You don't know what you're doing. It's already damaged. If the connection is lost. . . '

Instinctively, Jack moved back until he was far out of reach of the

newcomer.

He held the globe out to one side, balancing it on the palm of one hand. The man flinched visibly when he saw what Jack was doing.

‘I’ll break it some more if you take a step nearer, I promise you. One step nearer and I will.’ Jack had no idea why the globe was important, but as long as it kept the man away he didn’t care. He stole a glance at the globe when he was certain that the newcomer wasn’t about to launch himself at him. Its surface was etched with tiny pictures: faces, animals and strange squiggles, like Egyptian writing. A deep crack ran across the globe.

The man was standing motionless on the stairs, holding his arms out in front of him, silently begging Jack to give him the globe. In the quiet after the noise of the fight, all Jack could hear was the pounding of his own heart.

The Doctor was clambering slowly to his feet, gingerly exploring his bruised jaw. He appeared shocked, as if he wasn’t used to feeling physical pain. There was no way that the Doctor was going to be able to negotiate their release.

Jack looked from the Doctor to the crew-cut man. It was going to be up to him to get them out of here.

Filling his voice with as much authority as he could muster, he ordered the man on the stairs to walk to the far end of the room. The man complied, but paused when he reached the spot where their attacker lay, begging Jack to let him tend his brother. Jack ordered him on, letting the globe slip between his fingers dramatically to make the seriousness of his threat clear.

The Doctor finally looked at him and smiled weakly.

‘Get out, Doctor. Get up the stairs.’ Jack nodded towards the exit and they slowly began to edge out of the room. The Doctor used his hands to steady himself as he climbed the stairs, crawling up like a spider. Jack mounted each step slowly, keeping his eyes fixed on the crew-cut man.

It was when they reached the top of the short flight of stairs that Jack began to think that they might escape with their lives. He turned to face the two men who’d made his life a misery with their threats and blackmail.

‘Catch!’ he shouted, and threw the globe high up into the room. The last thing he saw before he turned and fled, was the crew-cut man launch himself through the air, arms out-stretched, like a cricketer diving for the ball.

Jack didn’t stop to see if he made his catch.

Patsy pressed the bell on the unmarked door for a second time, and stamped her feet impatiently. ‘Come on, come on.’

After a few moments, a small slot cut into the door at head height was slid back, revealing a pair of anxious eyes which darted between Chris and Patsy.

‘We’re closed,’ a male voice snapped from behind the door. ‘There’s no entry after eleven.’

‘We’re here to see the Major,’ Patsy informed the slot. ‘Open the door.’

‘Do you know the password?’

Patsy raised her eyebrows. ‘Don’t be silly, of course I don’t know the password. I’ve got a message from Mother. Now let me in.’

The door opened and a young, nervous-looking man ushered them inside.

‘Why didn’t you say that Mother sent you? The Major’s upstairs. Come on up.’

Chris followed them up to a room on the first floor, negotiating several young men in white military uniforms who lay passed out on the stairs. Show tunes played softly from a gramophone which perched perilously on a lone dining chair. Chris guessed that there were at least thirty men crowded into the small room. Patsy was the only female guest. A few of the customers danced slowly in each other’s arms, silhouetted in the pale amber light which leaked through the thin curtains from a street lamp outside the single window.

Other men stood in small groups chatting quietly, laughing and drinking ale from small bottles.

Patsy introduced Chris to the Major. He was sitting by a small kitchen hatch, through which the nervous man who had admitted them was

now serving drinks. The Major was in his early sixties, with watery blue eyes and grey, wispy hair. He took a sip from his bottle of ale and raised it in warm welcome.

The Major murmured 'Bad show, bad show' as Chris relayed Tilda's message. 'We'd better batten down the hatches, tuck ourselves in for the night.'

He rubbed at a small scar on his forehead. 'I don't want any more trouble from the Scraton brothers. Funny, I thought we were free of them since old Albert died. I'll pass the word around. Make sure that no one leaves on their own.'

He left Patsy and Chris together as he wandered through the dancers, stopping briefly at each of the little groupings to warn them of the threat. Chris watched the old man as he moved gently through the crowd – he looked like the host of a diplomatic function. Chris was surprised and a little amused that such a respectable man should be running an illegal drinking den. He turned and realized that Patsy had been watching him with those large almond-shaped eyes of hers.

'He's a sweet old thing, the Major,' she purred. 'If he wasn't they wouldn't dare come. It's his respectability which makes his punters feel less insecure about drinking here.'

'Is it really so dangerous?'

Patsy didn't get to answer the question. She was interrupted by the sound of breaking glass. Chris glimpsed a small object as it hurtled across the room to strike the far wall with a heavy thud. There were a few yells of panic, and chairs were overturned as the men hurried away from the broken window.

The curtain billowed out in the cold night breeze, like a sail. Someone turned 50

off the gramophone, dragging the needle across the record as they did so, bringing the party to an end with an unpleasant and loud scratch. The room fell into an uneasy silence.

'It's only a brick,' the Major called, trying to sound reassuring and failing.

Chris was already sidling up to the window, his back to the wall, peering through the gap in the moving curtains. His hand automatically reached for his shoulder holster before he remembered

that he wasn't armed, that he didn't carry a gun any more. Grimacing, he wondered if he was always going to behave like a police officer.

Peering out into the night, Chris was aware of movement in the shadows at the base of the building. There were two, perhaps three figures – although without nightglasses he couldn't be sure. He wondered what they would try next. That they hadn't fled immediately after the attack was not a good sign.

A light flared in the darkness of the street. Chris glimpsed the milk bottle a second before it was thrown.

'Get down!'

he shouted, diving on to the floor as the Molotov cocktail smashed against the windowsill. Broken glass and burning petrol were sprayed across the men in the tiny club. The clothes of those nearest the window were doused in the hot liquid. Panic spread through the crowd faster than the fire. Men screamed as they frantically tried to pat out the flames which quickly spread up the front of their suits. It took only a few moments for the curtains to burn; the fire crept up the walls, blistering the thick paint.

The room started to fill with thick, acrid smoke.

Everyone tried to leave at the same time.

On the floor, Chris rolled over twice to suffocate the burning petrol which had landed on the back of his jacket. He felt the heat through the material but he wasn't hurt. Staying low to avoid the smoke, he made a quick assess-ment of the situation. Already a bottleneck had formed at the door to the club. Those at the back of the crowd were trying to push their way through, only increasing the pressure on the people squeezed in the hallway. It was the classic result of panic. No one was thinking. Instead, like animals stamped-ing, everyone was gripped by the primitive need to survive. Ironically, it was precisely that which was going to kill them. In internal building fires, people were rarely burnt to death, more often it was the smoke or being crushed which killed them.

Chris began to pull off those men at the back of the crowd, telling them to kneel down and keep their heads by the floor where there was less smoke. He gave out the instruction in a calm reassuring voice. It wasn't an act: Chris felt calm. It was as if the fire was an abstract problem and he wasn't in any real danger himself. He had a procedure to deal with the fire, and as long as he followed it everything would

be all right. After the last few weeks of listless 51

wandering, tackling this emergency was a relief. It felt good just to be doing something.

The doorway began to clear a little, and Chris started to guide the rest of the crowd through. He was coughing continuously now – each breath felt hotter than the last. As he joined the last of the men trying to leave, he heard what he took to be the primitive siren of whatever passed for emergency services in this decade.

Chris was about to make his escape, when he heard Patsy calling him. He looked around trying to locate her in the smoke. He hadn't seen her since the fire bomb and had assumed that she had been among the first to leave. Her voice sounded close and oddly calm, but he couldn't see her. It was only when she spoke for the second time that he realized he was hearing her voice inside his head.

The Major. He didn't get out. He's still in there.

Guarding his face with his hand, Chris crawled back into the room. Every time he opened his eyes they watered immediately, turning the room into a fierce orange blur. If the firefighters in this era had enhanced visual and breathing equipment then he was taking a stupid risk. But if they didn't, the heat was going to prevent anyone without them from mounting a rescue in this room in a few minutes' time.

Chris felt rather than saw the Major, coming across one of his feet as he crawled along the edge of the room. There was no time to establish whether he was still breathing; instead Chris just got hold of his leg and dragged him back into the hallway. Then he picked him up, put him over his shoulder and carried him down the stairs and out on to the road.

The cold air hurt as he gulped great lungfuls of it down. His eyes were streaming with tears. Blinking through them he could see the shapes of fire engines and ambulances. The customers from the Upstairs Room must have fled, because none were in sight, although a crowd was gathering to watch the building burn. Chris allowed the Major to be lifted out of his arms, and felt himself guided towards what he assumed was an ambulance.

'I'm fine,' he muttered, his voice hoarse as he was helped into the back of the vehicle. 'I'm not hurt. I just need to get my breath. I don't need a doctor.

I don't need to go to a medical centre. Honestly.'

'Hospital?' questioned a gruff male voice nearby. Chris's hands were tugged behind his back, and he felt the cold metal grip of handcuffs close around his wrists.

'You're not going to hospital, mate. You're under arrest.'

The Doctor had asked for an ice pack but Jack didn't have a refrigerator, and he didn't dare go down and ask Mrs Carroway if he could take some from 52

hers. He couldn't think of a legitimate reason why he might need any. Not in October, anyway. Instead he soaked a tea towel in cold water, of which there was plenty, and hoped that would be sufficient.

The Doctor was sitting cross-legged in the middle of the room Jack shared with Mikey. He took the tea towel from Jack without question and used it to gingerly dab his face, which was already beginning to swell after the beating: he had the beginnings of a black eye, and his lip was cut and puffy. The Doctor must have seen the expression of concern on Jack's face, because he tried to grin reassuringly, but only succeeded in making his lip start bleeding again.

They had run for what felt like hours after they fled the nightclub. The Doctor always a little ahead, occasionally glancing over his shoulder to check that Jack was still behind him. At first, Jack had been scared that they were going to be followed, but there had been no sign of that. And once he had realized that they had escaped from those awful men, that they had got away with it, he had started to laugh as he kept pace with the Doctor. For the first time in months he felt safe and free. He deliberately jumped in the puddles as he ran, soaking his trouser bottoms. And when trying to laugh and run at the same time had given him a stitch, he called to the Doctor to stop and they walked the rest of the way to Notting Hill and home.

Mikey had returned from work by the time they got back. The tall, lanky, West Indian lad was in his usual bad mood, grumbling about the people he worked with on the building site. Jack hadn't been sure what Mikey was going to say about the Doctor staying over. Mikey had frowned when Jack opened the window to let the Doctor in, but so far he hadn't said anything. Ever since Mikey's little brother had come to stay with them, they had made a sort of unspoken alliance to help keep each others' guests secret from Mrs Carroway.

The Doctor was sitting by the small gas fire, the blue light from little

jets making his eyes twinkle. Jack made the three of them tea, and sat down beside the Doctor.

‘We’re not going to be safe here, are we?’

The Doctor looked from Jack to where Mikey sat on the bed, sipping his tea and gently stroking his little brother’s hair. ‘I think we can rest tonight.’

‘But they know where I live. They’ll come after us, won’t they? Those men, I mean.’

The Doctor nodded. ‘Yes. They will come after us. We’ve inconvenienced them a little too greatly for them just to let us alone.’ The Doctor replaced his solemn expression with a reassuring smile. ‘We can worry about that in the morning. But we may have to leave here for a while. You may have to leave here for good.’ The Doctor surveyed the small, sparsely furnished room. ‘Is this place important to you?’

‘No,’ Jack said, deciding to come clean. ‘I was ready to run away this

evening, before you came back.’

‘I’d rather formed that impression.’ The Doctor grinned, and then winced because it hurt. ‘London isn’t your home town, I take it?’

‘Darlington. My mum and dad still live there. We get on and everything.

They love me, they just wouldn’t understand. . . ’ He paused, uncertain of how much he could confide in the Doctor. ‘I always knew that I was going to leave. Even when I was a little kid I knew I wasn’t going to stay there. Wasn’t going to get a pound-down house and the Hoovermatic on the never-never, a mortgage and the payments on the car.’

Jack hugged his knees, the gas fire was making them uncomfortably hot.

‘I always knew that I was different. That I didn’t belong.’ He looked at the Doctor. ‘You know?’

‘Oh yes,’ the Doctor said, his eyes full of dark fire. ‘I know.’

Jack found himself telling the Doctor a little about his life in Darlington.

Much more than he usually told anyone. The Doctor listened attentively, particularly, Jack thought, when he began to talk about Eddy.

The Doctor only interrupted his story once, and Jack thought that it was a strange comment to make. When Jack mentioned that Eddy came from Leicester, the Doctor shook his head and muttered, 'No, I think he came from rather further away than that.'

When Jack finally finished his story, the Doctor asked him what colour Eddy's hair was. Jack was a little bewildered by the question.

'Brown,' he answered. 'Almost black.' And then he remembered his angry confrontation with Madge in the Magpie earlier that evening. Remembered that she'd sacked Eddy for dying his hair.

'At least it was. I think he bleached it before. . . well, you know.'

'Ah, I see,' the Doctor interrupted softly. 'He must have cared for you very deeply.'

'This man needs a doctor. Hello. I know you can hear me.'

Chris peered through the grill in the door, but all he could see were the white tiles on the wall of the corridor opposite. He banged his fist angrily against the metal door, which rattled on its hinges. Several other occupants of the cells further down the corridor started shouting in response to the noise.

Most telling him in no uncertain terms to keep quiet, and a couple of others just wordlessly and piteously wailing.

Chris let himself slump against the heavy door and looked across at the other occupant of the cell. The Major sat on the edge of the long concrete bed staring straight out in front of him and rocking gently back and forth. Initially, Chris had put the Major's condition down to shock, but it was clear that this 54

was something more than that. The old man was running a temperature and a constant stream of what sounded like nonsense escaped from his mouth.

That the Major hadn't been sent directly to a hospital was another

indication of the barbarism of the age. Chris had been astonished and angered to find the Major sitting in the cell when he'd been brought down. He'd tried to reason with the sergeant who'd escorted him, but the young Irish man took no notice of his protests, adopting a strategy of wilful deafness that Chris knew only too well.

All Chris's possessions, as well as his jacket, belt and shoelaces, had been removed before he was incarcerated. His handkerchief had been confiscated, along with the rest, so Chris ripped the cuff from his shirt and used it to mop the old man's brow.

'Nothing. . . I'm nothing. . . ' The old man's voice was an anxious whisper. 'I can't feel them. . . the club. . . anything. . . I can't feel anything. . . what am I to be?'

'It's all right. Try to rest, it's all right.'

Chris jumped when the Major suddenly broke out of his melancholy trance and sat up, gripping Chris's arm tightly. 'It's not all right, young man,' he exclaimed, his fingernails digging painfully into Chris's forearm. 'It's not all right at all. Mother. You must take a message to Mother.'

'I will,' Chris promised. 'We can take it together when they let us out of here.'

The Major shook his head. 'No. They won't let me go. Disorderly house and all that. No bail for the likes of me. You must do it for me.'

The message the Major gave him didn't make any sense to Chris, but he committed it to memory anyway. The Major's moment of coherence was lost and he lay back against the cell wall, muttering and shaking his head.

Chris watched him for a few minutes, before curling up to try to get some rest himself. His lungs still ached from the fire and his clothes and hair reeked of bitter smoke. He'd drunk far more than he usually did and his mouth felt thick and swollen. He lay on the uncomfortable bench, thinking about the strange events of the evening. He found himself thinking about Patsy, the way it had felt when her thoughts had slipped into his mind. It had been a pleasant feeling, warm and reassuring, like the first sip of hot coffee after being out in the cold. It reminded him just how caught up in his own thoughts and feelings he'd been over the last month. How alone he'd been.

He hugged himself to try to keep warm in the cold cell. He drifted off

to sleep, his thoughts full of the strange people he'd met that evening.

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Interlude

Gilliam's Story

The royal barge, the *Jewelled Sword*, floated quietly in the skies above the capital city of Kr'on Tep. The queen's shuttle, tiny against the bulk of the enormous interstellar craft, detached itself and dropped away from the curved underbelly of the barge and headed towards the planet below.

The pilot of the shuttle was the queen herself. Her hands moved expertly over the instruments which controlled the craft. After she punched the course information, the automatics took over and the queen tugged the release of the seat's harness and slipped down on to the deck.

She was going to get into trouble for this. Her schedule had been carefully arranged for the next two years. Glancing at the time she realized that she had already missed two engagements – one of which was with the Thordon ambassador itself. There would be an uproar. Particularly when her husband found out.

Well that was just too bad. This time she'd had enough. Queen Gilliam dressed in her cabin, exchanging her silk robes for a pair of rough canvas trousers and one of her husband's old shirts. She tied her shoulder length blonde hair back into a ponytail, and pulled on the heavy boots she had shamelessly stolen from one of her bodyguards.

One of the many problems with being queen was that no one would let you wear anything remotely practical. On more formal occasions, her clothing was so intricate and unwieldy that two handmaidens were required just to allow her to be seated. The suffocating constraints of royal clothing was only a reflection of the tight organization of a queen's life. Gilham's day began shortly before sunrise and royal business was rarely finished before the sun had set. In addition to being the nominal Queen of Kr'on Tep and its Seven Systems, she was personally the Governor of seven worlds, as well as the director of several health and education initiatives on the planet below. The concept of a 'holiday' was unknown to the royal courts of Kr'on Tep.

Until now.

Queen Gilliam tossed the last of her equipment into a holdall, threw some underwear on top of the assorted instruments and headed for the airlock.

She arrived just as the shuttle's engines were powering down. The craft had 57

brought her to its programmed destination. After a few short moments, she was standing on the hot surface of the planet of which she was queen. It was the first time she had been alone in the open air in more than twenty years. A wicked grin snuck across her face; they would be going crazy up on the barge.

The shuttle had whipped up the dust on the mountainside where it had landed.

Gilliam waited until stinging clouds settled before jamming her favourite brown suede hat on to her head and moving off.

The Palace of the First Queen of Kr'on Tep had been one of the grandest structures on the planet in its day. But its day was long gone and now it was only a series of cracked and broken slabs of granite-like rock littered across the hillside. Only the centre of the palace remained standing, a cluster of buildings which had once been the royal apartments. It was for this that Gilliam had abandoned her royal duties. As she slipped out of the heat of the day and into the cool shadows of the ancient palace, she prayed that what she hoped to discover was going to be worth it.

Gilliam set up camp in the Chamber of the First Queen. The room was large, and still almost completely intact. The desert sun forced itself into the room through long cracks in the ceiling, casting streaks of light across the jagged and uneven floor. It took a few minutes to erect her thermo-tent in one of the corners of the room. Gilliam unfolded the heavy canvas sheets with care; maintaining the tent's integrity was vital. The palace was close to the planet's equator, and the temperature fluctuated wildly between day and night. The hot desert outside would cool quickly once night came – she would need the protection of the tent's regulated environment if she were going to survive the night. Only when she was certain that the tent was functioning did she allow herself to begin her investigation in earnest.

According to her research, the palace had been a wedding gift to the first queen of Kr'on Tep, a woman scientist named Petruska. She was the bride of the first and most famous of all the kings in Kr'on Tep's

history: the man-god, Moriah. Several thousand years before, Moriah had arrived from the depths of space to conquer Kr'on Tep and turn it into one of the most powerful civilizations in this part of space. According to the ancient history of the planet, Petruska had been unfaithful to Moriah and, in his anger, he had killed her and then fled Kr'on Tep, never to return.

At least that was the official version of the story. Gilliam cracked open a small flask of wine, and took a long swig from the bottle. She had long suspected that there was more to the story of the first royal couple than this legend of betrayal and murder. And so she had decided to abandon her royal duties and engage in a little bit of historical detective work. Her suspicions centred around the small symbols which had been neatly inscribed into the walls of the chamber.

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The palace was famous for its song. Petruska had decorated the walls of her bedchamber with unique symbols which could be translated into a beautiful piece of music: a song of love for her husband, Moriah. Or so the archeologists said. The music was now one of the best known pieces in their society; indeed it had been played at Gilliam's own wedding. It was a quiet, simple melody.

And it had always struck Gilliam as being more a torch song, mourning what had been lost, than a declaration of passion and love.

Its sadness had always intrigued Gilliam. She had first heard the aching melody as she walked down the aisle on her wedding day. It had accompanied her uncertain steps towards a future with a man she didn't love, and her angry steps away from the man who had abandoned her.

She brushed away the resentful feelings which still haunted her and unpacked her equipment. She dug out the sheaf of research notes she had made on the musical symbols. Gilliam had first begun to suspect that the symbols might be more than just the notes to a song when she had made a study of Petruska's life before she had been crowned queen. During this period of Kr'on Tep's history, before Moriah had invaded, a curious sexual division of labour had been in place which allowed women access to the arts and sciences but forbade them involvement in political life. Gilliam had heard of proto-feminist writing hidden in the musical notation of the period. These women had been communicating to each other in a language secreted in

musical phrasing.

Using a small handheld recorder, Gilliam took an electronic impression of the carvings on part of one of the walls, a sort of sonic brass rubbing. Using the snatches of earlier writing as a code breaker, Gilliam fed the results of the scan into her portable terminal and waited. If there was a message hidden in Petruska's song, the terminal would decode it, and offer a translation. She was so absorbed in the small hieroglyphs flickering across the screen as the computer searched for matches, that she wasn't aware of the man's presence in the chamber until he was right beside her.

'Good evening, Highness.'

Gilliam almost knocked her terminal over as she whirled to face the newcomer. Her immediate reaction was to hide her work guiltily but she forced herself to leave the computer to finish its operation. 'Ala'dan! I have to say I'm glad it's you that's come for me and not the –' She just managed to stop herself as she realized what she had been about to say.

The king's chancellor bowed. He was an old man, his angular face tanned and etched with thousands of wrinkles from a long life spent in the desert.

Ala' dan had always been quietly supportive of her, and Gilliam was terribly fond of him.

'It is good to see your Highness. When I heard of your disappearance I was concerned that perhaps the Thordon ambassador had kidnapped you. I must 59

say that I am surprised that you chose this place as your bolt-hole.'

'I suppose that I've you to thank that the king didn't send his personal guard to drag me back by my hair?'

Ala'dan had the good grace to frown at this insult to his king, but Gilliam could see the smile hovering on the edge of his face. 'You underestimate the king, Highness,' he said. 'You're not the first royal wife to flee the Kr'on Tep court. The king has asked only that you are back for the state banquet this evening.'

'I won't go,' Gilliam said, immediately aware of how childish this sounded.

Ala'dan gestured around the empty room. 'You have something more important to do here?'

Her terminal chose that moment to buzz satisfactorily, indicating that it had finished its task. It had decoded the first section of the wall carvings.

'Actually yes. I think I do have something better to do.'

A single sentence of translation sat on the screen. The translation software had marked the sections of the text that were its own best guesses. The sentence appeared to be part of a personal statement or journal.

My name is Petruska, First Queen of Kr'on Tep, Ruler of the Seven Systems, and I am a prisoner in this place. . .

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5

Something Beneath The Skin

Chief Inspector Harris was shaving when the telephone rang. I'll get it, love,'

he called out to his wife, wiping the last few smears of soap from his cheeks.

It was one of the sergeants from the station. Someone had burnt down one of the queer clubs last night. No one had been hurt, but it reflected badly on the policing of Soho. The chief superintendent was rousing his inspectors early for morning prayers – the daily planning meeting for all senior staff at the station. Apparently the chief inspector wanted a strategy for dealing with the extortion gangs by lunchtime.

Harris blew the air out of his cheeks as he pulled his starched shirt over his vest. It was a wasted effort as far as he was concerned. He could predict the result of the meeting. It would be decided to police Soho hard for a few weeks; arrange a couple of raids, pull in the familiar faces, make a few unnecessary and unproductive arrests and a good few more threats. In fact, generally make their presence felt to quieten down activity in the area. But it wouldn't last. Give it a month or two and then it would all start up again just the same as before. The racketeers would crawl out of their holes to begin their rounds

and the blackmailers would dip their quills in their murky ink, ready to put the squeeze on another pathetic victim. Staring at his reflection in the mirror, Harris couldn't see an end to it.

He glanced at his watch. He'd better get a move on if he was going to be on time for the chief super. His wife appeared in the kitchen doorway, wiping her hands on her apron, a look of disapproval on her face.

'Have your breakfast at least, dear? The things they make you do to your stomach. I ought to give you a packed lunch.'

He shook his head. 'Don't you worry about me. I'll have one of the lads run out for a roll.'

'You can't live on a roll,' she scolded. 'What about dinner?'

'Tell you what – cook it and keep your fingers crossed.'

'I don't know why you don't move into that office.'

'You'd never believe I was there.' The conversation was a ritual. He spoke his lines without thinking.

'What makes you think I do now?'

Harris smiled apologetically, kissed his wife gently on the cheek and headed for the front door. As it closed behind him, Harris found himself wondering when they had stopped kissing on the lips.

Harris was surprised to find the Doctor sitting cross-legged on the top step of Charing Cross Police Station. He was engrossed in a tatty paperback and chewing on an apple. On catching sight of the chief inspector, the Doctor leapt to his feet and hurried over, stopping only to throw the book into a nearby dustbin and tuck the apple core carefully away in his pocket. Harris could only laugh as the gnomic figure bounded up to him.

'I do hope that wasn't a library book, Doctor. I should have to run you in.'

'How could you think such a thing of me, Chief Inspector? I'm a law-abiding citizen.'

'I should hope so too, a man in your position.'

The Doctor frowned for a moment, as if unsure to what the policeman was referring. ‘Oh yes,’ he said, after a moment, ‘of course.’

There was an awkward pause; the Doctor stuffed his hands in his pockets and looked away for a moment. Harris wasn’t sure what had happened to break the jovial atmosphere between them. Perhaps the Doctor was feeling guilty about taking time away from his hospital duties to assist with the case?

Harris decided not to mention the Middlesex Hospital again.

‘Was the book really that bad?’ he asked, trying to change the subject as they walked into the station.

‘Dreadful. It professed to be a serious history of criminal activity in London in the twentieth century but I suspect that the newspaper gossip columns formed the author’s primary research source. Tell me, Chief Inspector, what do you know about the Scraton brothers?’

Harris was surprised to hear the name. Little had been heard from the Scratons since Albert, the oldest brother and leader of the firm, had died earlier that year, leaving his younger brother, Gordon, head of the firm. He told the Doctor what he knew of the Scratons’ record. They were strictly small-time, gambling mostly. ‘To be honest, Gordy Scraton is a spineless young man, Doctor. I can’t imagine him being much of a threat to anyone.’

The Doctor considered this for a moment. ‘What about the younger brother.

Carl, isn’t it? I understand that he’s quite dangerous?’

‘Carl Scraton?’ Harris repeated. ‘I didn’t know that there were three of them.’

As they waited for the desk-sergeant to prepare the Doctor a visitor’s pass, the first of last night’s ‘guests’ were brought up from the cells. Harris watched as the usual collection of drunkards and tramps were released. It was station policy to empty the cells before the day’s business began in earnest. The last 62

thing you wanted was respectable people trying to report a burglary whilst a drunkard still covered in his own vomit was pushed back out on to the street.

Of course, they’d be back in the cells the following night more likely

than not.

It was a depressing cycle. Sometimes Harris thought that all they were doing was running a hotel for down and outs.

Harris watched as an old girl was gently coaxed out of the station by a young constable. She looked in her late sixties, but she was probably younger than that – life on the streets ate up the signs of youthfulness and spat out old age.

Her round face was wrinkled and decorated with a maze of broken capillaries.

Her nose was purple from gin or meths and her ankles were painfully swollen above her disintegrating shoes. She was babbling incoherently at the young constable, who was doing his best to humour her whilst trying, unsuccessfully, to lead her to the door. She appeared to be trying to convince the lad of the existence of monstrous cars that were scouring through London eating up the unwary.

Typical.

Harris had caught the young constable's eye – a spotty lad, who looked like he'd passed his eleven-plus yesterday – and was shaking his head in sympathy when he became aware that the Doctor had left his side and was marching over towards the pair. The little man doffed his battered hat and, ignoring the young policeman entirely, addressed the old woman.

'Good morning, Madam, I'm the Doctor. If I could have a minute of your time.'

'Eh?' the woman started, recoiling from his politeness. The constable opened his mouth and then closed it again, unsure of the status of the little man. Harris started to walk over, but then stopped, suddenly unwilling to implicate himself in the scene.

The Doctor closed both of his hands around one of the woman's, and leant forward to communicate that she had his full attention. He reminded Harris of a country vicar.

'Tell me,' the Doctor started, softly, 'this vehicle that ate someone whole.

Can you remember what sort of vehicle it was? Even the colour might be useful?'

‘Black cab, wasn’t it?’ the woman spluttered. She was so pleased to have an audience that she tripped over her words in her enthusiasm to get them out.

‘Came out of the dark, it did. Drove through it like it could see in the smog.’

‘Yes,’ the Doctor agreed, tapping his chin with his umbrella handle. ‘I’d rather gathered that impression as well.’

The old woman’s eyes lit up. ‘You’ve seen it too. Now maybe someone’ll believe me.’

‘Sir,’ the young constable began. ‘I wouldn’t pay too much mind to Margaret 63

here. She’s. . . well, this isn’t the first time we’ve had her come around here telling her stories.’

‘I see,’ the Doctor said, solemnly.

Margaret’s face fell, the constable’s comments having robbed her of an audience for her story.

‘Let me get this straight, Constable,’ the Doctor said, after a moment’s thought. ‘Are you ignoring what this woman is saying because she is old, homeless, or because you think her mad?’

The constable reacted to the authority in the Doctor’s voice by attempting to impose his own. Ignoring the Doctor’s question, he said, ‘Sir, if you’ll just step out of the way. I must escort this person from the premises.’

Harris quickly interceded. ‘It’s all right son, the Doctor’s with me. He’s a pathologist from the Middlesex.’

The constable blushed a little beneath his acne. ‘I’m sorry, sir. I didn’t know.’

The Doctor accepted the apology with a wave of his hand. ‘That’s all right, Constable,’ he said, cheerfully. ‘For all you knew I could have been an ordinary person taking an interest in the world.’

The constable blinked slowly, having to think hard about this remark. By the time he had worked out what the little man had meant, the Doctor was busy discussing other topics.

‘If I’m to track down this vehicle, Inspector Harris, I’ll need a staff car, one of your sergeants and –’ the Doctor patted his pockets some money.’

‘I see, Doctor,’ Harris began, having absolutely no idea what was going on.

‘Exactly how much money?’

‘Oh, just enough for three full English breakfasts.’

Harris dug his hands into his pockets and considered this request. ‘Very well, I’ll have Bridie drive the car round for you. He won’t have much to do while I’m with the chief super.’ Speaking of which, he was going to be late for morning prayers if he didn’t get a move on.

As the Doctor and the old woman made to leave Harris excused himself and threaded his way through the building towards the chief superintendent's suite on the third floor. As he waited for the lift, two constables brought a tall, broad-shouldered blond man past him. The young man looked tired, his face and hair were smeared with soot. The rank taste of bitter smoke stung the back of the chief inspector's throat. The blond-haired man must have been involved in the fire at the queer club last night.

The lift arrived, and Harris entered and pushed the button for the third floor. Through the gap in the closing doors he watched the three men make their way down the corridor – the two uniformed officers were completely dwarfed by the blond prisoner. Funny, he didn't look like one of them, but then you could never tell.

The doors closed, blocking Harris's view. Within a couple of moments, Harris had forgotten all about the blond-haired man.

Chris Cwej sat on the front steps of Charing Cross Police Station threading his shoelaces back into his shoes. He wasn't wholly sure how he was going to find his way back to the TARDIS. The autumn morning was bright and clear; he squinted as his aching fingers struggled with his shoes. The cold morning wind bit through his thin shirt. He needed a bath. The smoke from the fire had left a greasy film on his skin. He wanted to change out of this costume and put some of his own clothes on. What he really felt like doing was climbing into his armour and charging his blaster.

An image of the Doctor's disapproving face appeared in his mind. Chris found himself wondering where the Doctor was and what he was up to. Suddenly, Chris wanted to be in the company of his friend. Didn't want to have to cope with another day in a strange place on his own.

A shadow fell across him. 'Morning, baby,' a female voice said. 'Does little Christopher Robin need some help with his laces?'

It was Patsy. She was squinting at him in the sunlight, one hand resting wearily on her hip, an eyebrow raised. She had replaced her short cocktail dress with a man's flannel suit, two sizes too big. Her blonde hair was tied back into a tight ponytail. Last night, she'd looked like a substance user; this morning she looked like a pop star.

And then Chris remembered that she was.

He allowed himself to be pulled to his feet. Patsy's hair smelt of lacquer, strong and exotic. After the sterility of the police station it was intoxicating.

'So, you're a free man, Christopher Cwej.'

'I've been "cautioned" – whatever that means.'

'So tell me, are you going to be a good boy and act with caution from now on?'

He grinned, warming to her mischievous mood. 'Is there an alternative?'

'Baby, there's always an alternative. You could always throw your "caution"

to the wind and risk breakfast with me.'

Chris sipped his tea and chewed slowly on some buttered toast and jam. The bread was bleached white and didn't taste of anything. The butter was salty, too salty. Patsy had brought him to a café tucked away in the back of a musty old book shop off the Charing Cross Road. She'd explained that she'd once worked as a waitress in the café before she had been 'discovered' by her manager. It was owned by a cheerful middle-aged man called David, who doted on Patsy, referring to her as 'our own little starlet.'

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Patsy had slipped out to telephone Tilda, who joined them shortly afterwards. She arrived in a flustered state, wrapped up in a headscarf and dark glasses, and dragging hard on a strong Turkish cigarette.

'Can't be too careful, *deahs*,' she barked. 'I fear that the Tropics is under surveillance. Lilly Law is crawling over Soho like lice over a rugby scrum.

And just when I thought it couldn't get worse, I hear that the Major's been arrested.' She wagged a finger at Patsy. 'I thought I told you to keep an eye on the old thing.'

'Mother!' Angrily, Patsy ground her cigarette out in the remains of her breakfast. 'Christopher and I saved his life.'

Chris nodded; he hadn't forgotten Patsy's strange unspoken communication in the Upstairs Room. 'We shared a cell. He's very ill, but the police didn't take it very seriously. I asked for a doctor, but they weren't interested.'

Tilda's face became grim. 'The silly old trout isn't built to do bird,' she snapped irritably, but the concern in her voice was evident. 'A spell in prison is going to kill him just as surely as any bullet would.'

'He was sure that he wasn't going to be released this morning. He asked me to bring a message to you.'

'Oh?' Tilda looked directly at Chris, her expression carefully neutral. 'What did he say?'

Chris thought back to the Major's moment of lucidity in the cells. 'He asked me to tell you that he was expecting some important guests to come and stay with him. He wanted you to go and collect them and take care of them in his absence.'

Patsy and Tilda exchanged glances. 'I see,' began Tilda, cautiously. 'Was that all?'

'Yep. That's all. He made it sound important. Is it?'

Tilda ignored his question. She turned to Patsy and asked her if she would see to it. Patsy immediately agreed, all trace of her earlier annoyance gone.

The two women started to make travel plans, discussing the logistics of Patsy leaving London by lunchtime. It was clear from the way that they referred to them that these 'guests' were no casual visitors.

The two women were careful not to reveal the identities of their friends, and their self-consciousness was making Chris feel more than a little left out.

'If you tell me who these people are,' he started, 'and what this is all about, perhaps I can help.'

Patsy looked at Tilda and arched an eyebrow. 'He did save the Major.'

Tilda shrugged dramatically in reply. 'I suppose we could use his help. Very well, daughter, he won't believe us anyway. But if this should all go wrong I shall be the first in line to lay the blame entirely at your doorstep.'

‘So what’s new?’ Patsy commented, and stole one of Tilda’s cigarettes.

66

Tilda turned to Chris, and took a long drag on her cigarette as if drawing strength from it. ‘Look, *deah*.’ She spat out a plume of perfumed smoke. ‘The fact of the matter is we are not of your miserable race and we are not from this prissy little planet. The sad truth is that we are refugees from the stars and are in dire need of some of your human charity.’ She stared imperiously at him, as if daring him to disbelieve her.

Chris met her gaze, raised an eyebrow and adopted a bored tone. ‘I’m way ahead of you. Now tell me something I don’t know.’

Gordy Scraton stood on Old Compton Street staring at the burnt out shell of the building opposite. He was quite oblivious to the other pedestrians going about their lunchtime business. His attention was entirely focused on the building opposite him. He looked upon the still-smoking ruin as an artist might look upon a newly completed canvas.

What had been the home to filth was now just blackened rubble and char-coal timbers. He hoped some of them had died in the fire. They didn’t deserve to live. Not around here. Not in his part of town.

This was only the beginning. Just the start. The blackened gap left in the row of townhouses reminded him of a mouth after a rotten tooth had been pulled. A proud smile crept across his face. Well there were gonna be more rotten teeth pulled in Soho before he was done. It was going to take a long time to get Soho back to how it should be. Back like it was when he was a kid playing footie and trailing after Albert and his mates. Back when it was a place where there weren’t any blacks on the streets. When there weren’t any filthy queers.

Last night had only been the start. It wasn’t going to be easy. Or cheap.

He’d had to pay those lads a packet to put the Molotov cocktail through the window. Hard cash on top of enough drinks for them to pluck up the courage.

But it was worth it. Once the other clubs heard about it they’d swiftly agree to his terms. Despite the Doctor having put an end to his blackmailing operation, the threat of another petrol-bombing would bring in a wave of new cash.

When the devil had spoken to him that morning he'd offered him more riches if Gordy continued to do his bidding. Gordy had promised that the little paperboy, Dennis, would be seen to shortly. And he'd keep his promise to do the devil's work. It wouldn't do to disappoint him. But only after he'd dealt with the Doctor. Only after he'd really hurt him. The Doctor and the boy.

Gordy stood and watched the smouldering building for a few more minutes, before turning and walking away.

* * *

67

The TARDIS welcomed Chris with a gentle humming which permeated its every room. His relief to be back within the indestructible walls of the Doctor's time-ship after a night in the cold police cells was immeasurable. Nothing, bar the odd transtemporal being – which were, thankfully, rather thin on the ground – could gain entry to the TARDIS uninvited. Feeling safe and secure, Chris showered and quickly towel-dried himself, pleased to wash the grey stain of soot from his body. Fresh faced and blow-dried, he fingered his Adjudicator armour lovingly for a moment before, regretfully, leaving it in his room and heading for the wardrobe.

He popped his head around the doors of the in-house library, swimming pool and theatre hoping to catch sight of the Doctor. There was no sign of him in any of these places, which wasn't really a surprise. Chris could usually tell if the Doctor was aboard the ship. It wasn't anything tangible, just a general feeling of alertness and expectation in the air when the Doctor was around.

At the moment, the cool, dimly lit corridors of the ship suggested that it was slumbering, patiently awaiting its master's return.

The wardrobe door was locked. A sign pinned to it read CLOSED FOR RE-FURBISHMENT in neat, hand-printed letters. Typical. The wardrobe was an expression of the ship's eccentricities: it was rarely to be found in the same location twice and changed its layout and style on an almost daily basis. The last time Chris had visited, it had been a huge warehouse of a room, with wicker baskets piled precariously up to the ceiling, each of which was chaotically stuffed full of brightly coloured clothes. On an earlier visit, it had appeared as a small gentleman's tailor's, complete with an elderly bespectacled shop assistant. When Chris had asked the Doctor if he knew that there

was a tailor aboard the TARDIS, the Doctor had replied, absently, that he'd been wondering who'd been sneaking into his bedroom and darning his socks.

A low-backed Edwardian nursing chair had been abandoned next to the wardrobe door. Draped over the chair was a navy pin-striped suit. A brown packing label attached to the jacket with a pin read: TIME: MID -TWENTIETH CENTURY.

SPACE: ENGLAND.

STYLE: INCOGNITO.

SIZE: ADJUDICATOR: LARGE.

Chris grinned and dressed. The TARDIS, like its owner, was usually a few steps ahead of him. He admired himself in a nearby floor-length mirror. Despite being labelled as INCOGNITO, the suit was decidedly flashy: the jacket boasted padded shoulders and a fitted waist; the trousers were baggy, but narrowed at the ankles. A knee-length navy coat and felt hat completed the 68

ensemble. It was a perfect fit. Chris tipped his hat at the wardrobe door and left the ship.

The Eastbound train sat waiting patiently on platform three. Chris paused for a moment to admire the huge engine. He gently ran the fingers of one hand along the carriages as he made his way along the platform towards first class.

The carriages of the train were two-tone: dark scarlet and bright yellow. The colours of blood and custard. Chris thought that it was the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen.

He found Patsy sitting in the first-class dining carriage of the train, oblivious to her surroundings and struggling with a champagne bottle.

'Bloody steward's disappeared and I can't wait,' she explained, intent on trying to loosen the cork. The table was neatly prepared for lunch. 'Did you find your friend?' she added, without looking up.

'What? Oh, no. He wasn't there.' Damn, he'd forgotten to leave a message for the Doctor in the TARDIS. Over the last month they had fallen into the habit of leaving messages taped to the control console. Sometimes it was easier than talking.

‘Then it’s just you and me.’ The cork popped, ricocheting across the compartment, smashing a glass on another table. Champagne erupted from the bottle pouring down Patsy’s arm. ‘Good,’ she added, unperturbed by the mess, and poured out two glasses.

‘Here’s to our mission,’ Patsy toasted.

Chris raised his glass and took the tiniest sip of champagne. ‘You still haven’t told me very much about it.’ He set the glass down and moved it purposely to one side. ‘Or about yourself.’

‘There’s not much to tell.’

Chris burst out laughing. ‘You’re an extraterrestrial in hiding on Earth in the 1950s and there’s not much to tell?’

‘You can talk, future boy.’ Patsy glanced at him sharply. ‘Christopher, you’re not going to make this difficult are you?’

‘I suspect I am.’

‘Very well,’ she said, ‘I’ll tell you. I come from a place far away from here.

And don’t ask me exactly where,’ she added quickly, ‘because I don’t know things like that.’

‘What’s the name of your planet?’

Patsy appeared to consider this for a moment. ‘Petruska,’ she said, finally.

‘I haven’t heard of it. What’s it like?’

‘Horrible. Authoritarian. Brutish.’ She sighed at the memory. ‘Mother, I mean Tilda, and the Major and I are all members of a racial minority. A 69

servile class. You’ve probably guessed by now that we’re empathic, haven’t you?’

Chris nodded. ‘I felt your concern for the Major during the fire. Like words in my head.’

‘We’re not really telepathic, more empathic, and only when the emotions are intensely felt.’

An image of Roz entered his thoughts suddenly. Staring at him, her face contorted into a sneer. *Stay the hell out of my mind.*

The train juddered once, and made a series of clanking noises before pushing its way out of Liverpool Street Station.

'What is it?' Patsy said, staring intently at him.

'Telepathy frightens me. I was infected with a telepathic virus. I couldn't control the ability and. . . I almost lost a friend.'

Patsy raised an eyebrow. 'People rarely thank you for reading their mind.'

Chris thought of Roz. Change the subject, Chris. 'So, tell me about your race.'

Patsy shrugged. 'OK. We're not really telepathic. Our true abilities are in empathy – our ability to sense other's moods and respond accordingly. At. . .

On Petruska, we've traditionally been employed as companions for wealthy people who want to. . . ' Patsy paused and then said with great bitterness, 'get in touch with their feelings. Their inner selves. You know.'

The emotion in her voice surprised Chris. 'You're like a sort of therapist?'

he asked.

'More like a slave, actually.'

There was an awkward pause. 'So how did you come to be on Earth?'

'Oh, we had support on our world. People who didn't believe we should be treated as second-class citizens. Do-gooders, you know. Our world is far more advanced than this one. When the campaign for equality failed, our friends provided the technology to allow us to flee. We've been trying to live secretly in London.' She shrugged. 'Places like Soho attract bohemians and eccentrics –' she looked directly at him '– and we're not so very different from you. We thought we'd be safe.'

'And after last night, you're not so sure?'

'Not just last night. Some of my people in London have been killed.

Murdered. I suppose it could be coincidence, but Tilda's worried that our oppres-sors have followed our trail here.'

The train had left the grey buildings of London behind. The view from the window had changed into a blur of green and blue. Countryside. Chris had been brought up in a world of concrete and plastic; he always felt a simple thrill every time the TARDIS brought him somewhere relatively unspoilt. It 70

suddenly occurred to him that he didn't know their exact destination. 'Where are we going?'

'To collect some new arrivals. More of my people who've managed to escape.'

'I know that. But where are they? You've only said that they're in Essex.'

'I've been given the name of one of the Major's contacts on the East coast.

It's a place on the Thames Estuary called Healey. Have you heard of it?'

Chris shook his head. 'Should I have?'

'I don't know; it's your planet.'

'Not for another century or three, it's not.'

'According to Mother, Healey is a. . . a village,' Patsy pronounced the word carefully, as if this were the first time she'd spoken it out loud. 'I've never been to a village. Mother says they're ghastly places; no wine bars or restaurants *at all*.'

Her indignation was endearing. 'How shocking!' Chris laughed.

'Too right!' She grinned. 'More champagne?'

The chief inspector was contemplating slipping out for lunch, when the Doctor popped his head around the door of his cubby-hole of an office. The little man appeared a little distracted, unsettled even.

The Doctor plonked himself down in front of the chief inspector's desk and sighed heavily. He leant on an elbow, his cheek wrinkling beneath his hand.

‘Chief Inspector, I’ve lost my friend.’

Harris considered this for a moment. Did he mean the bag lady he’d spoken to that morning? ‘Do you want to make a missing persons report?’

The Doctor’s face creased into a frown. ‘I don’t think it’s that serious.’ His eyes opened expressively. ‘At least, I hope not.’

Harris wanted to ask the Doctor about this business with the taxi. The description of the morning’s events recounted by Bridie had been bizarre in the extreme. Apparently, the Doctor had led the young sergeant to a small side street where the old woman had claimed to see a taxi swallow a young woman whole. Bridie had been furious at being sent on such a fool’s errand.

And frankly, Harris couldn’t blame him.

However, before he had the opportunity to ask the Doctor what the hell he’d been up to, the little man’s attention had been arrested by the photos which were scattered across Harris’s desk. His eyes were eagerly scanning the photographs taken at the various crime scenes.

Glancing up at Harris for a moment the Doctor muttered, ‘These are from our case?’

Harris nodded. Surprised to discover just how relieved he was to hear the Doctor refer to the murder inquiry as ‘ours’. After making sympathetic noises 71

about the difficulties of the case, the chief superintendent had made it pretty clear that he was going to hand the inquiry on if Harris didn’t come up with some results. And soon.

The Doctor arranged three of the photographs in front of the chief inspector.

Each one was a close-up of the victim’s throat wounds.

Harris looked from the gruesome pictures to the Doctor and shrugged.

‘Same modus operandi. Same killer. You’re not telling me anything I don’t already know, Doctor.’

The Doctor perched on the edge of the desk and leant over, directing Harris’s attention to the deep cuts in the base of the victims’ throats.

‘But why here? Why make incisions here? It doesn’t make any sense. If the perpetrator intended to kill, why not cut higher? Why not simply open the artery? Slit their throats?’

‘I wouldn’t like to hazard a guess as to what is going on in this man’s mind.’

The Doctor paused for a moment. ‘Inspector, have you ever heard of psychological profiling?’

‘Psycho-what?’

‘I thought not. To put it in simple language, we need to try and work out what’s going on inside our killer’s head. Why he is committing these heinous acts.’

‘I should have thought that was obvious, Doctor.’

‘Really? Oh, do tell.’

‘Well, because he’s a nutter.’

The Doctor blinked. Twice. ‘Yes, well I think we can do a bit better than that.’ And then he was off, rattling on about his ideas like an excited schoolboy. ‘Look again at the incisions. According to my, not inconsiderable, knowledge of your anatomy, there are no major arteries in any of these places.’

An intuitive part of Chief Inspector Harris reacted with alarm to the Doctor’s use of the word ‘your’ in that context. He swallowed, suppressing a ridiculous thought, and refocused on what the pathologist was saying. ‘Do you mean that they shouldn’t have died of these wounds?’

The Doctor considered this question. ‘Well, not as quickly as they did. In fact I was sure I was going to be able to save the boy, Eddy.’

Harris looked up, frowning. The name was unfamiliar. ‘Eddy who?’

The Doctor opened his mouth and then closed it again. ‘Ah,’ he managed, after a moment. ‘Nothing, Chief Inspector, nothing at all. Now,’ he hurried on, ‘I rather suspect that the reason that these incisions are so large is that something was actually removed from. . . ’

Harris stopped listening to the Doctor’s attempts to divert attention

from his slip. He held up his hand to break through the Doctor's monologue. 'Doctor, please answer my question. How do you know the dead boy's name?'

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The Doctor slipped off the desk and sat back in his chair. He looked like a naughty pupil called up in front of the headmaster. Sulky and silent.

'Doctor, I would remind you that this is a murder inquiry: withholding evidence is a serious criminal offence.'

The Doctor looked defiant for a moment and then his expression collapsed.

'Oh very well. I found the last murder victim's personal possessions. I intended to slip them back to you, but. . . well, I've been preoccupied with. . . well, that doesn't matter now. I forgot. But, yes, I do know who he is. Or rather was.'

Harris was barely holding on to his temper. 'Then why the hell didn't you tell me?'

'I. . . um. . . wanted to look into it first. Sorry.'

Harris gave the Doctor a withering look. 'Quite the amateur detective, aren't we?' He called for Bridie, who appeared in the doorway. The sergeant didn't bother to conceal his disapproval of the Doctor. 'Sergeant, we've got a positive identification on the dead boy. Doctor?'

The Doctor exhaled and dug his hands into the pockets of his trousers. 'Eddy Stone. He was a hairdresser at Snips Salon, Wardour Street.'

'I know the place,' Bridie muttered, jotting the name in his notebook. He turned to his senior officer. 'Where did this information come from, sir?'

Harris tapped his desk, impatiently. 'Don't worry about that now. Just get on with it. Get a home address and see if you can't find out what the score was at the salon.'

'Right-o, sir.' Bridie looked for a moment at the Doctor, who was playing absently with his tie. He shook his head and left.

Harris got up and closed the door behind him, turning the small key in

the lock. He didn't want the whole station to hear this. The Doctor looked a little relieved that Harris had left the key in the door.

After rummaging in his desk drawer for his emergency bottle of scotch, Harris poured out two small glasses and set one of them in front of the Doctor, who eyed it as if he suspected that it might be poison.

'Doctor, I think you'd better start at the beginning, don't you?'

They booked into the guest house under the names of Mr and Mrs Christopher Cwej, although it was clear from the look the housekeeper gave that she didn't believe them for an instant. She led them up to a small, cold room at the top of the house.

'Hey, I like this,' Patsy exclaimed sarcastically, as she surveyed the grubby room. 'Early Nothing.'

Chris winced. Mrs Hardly merely pursed her thin lips and snapped, 'I lock the door at ten. Breakfast finishes at eight. No animals and no exceptions.'

With that she marched off, her heavy footsteps loudly sounding her disapproval on the wooden stairs as she descended.

Chris set down the bags he'd been carrying from the station at the bottom of the double bed. 'Well, at least the place looks lived in.'

'Yeah, but by what?'

He joined Patsy at the window which provided a view of the village green.

Healey was a pretty if rather unremarkable place; just a hotchpotch of houses clustered around a square of grass. Despite the cold, a group of boys were playing an anarchic game of football on the muddy green. Their hair was cut short, and neatly side-parted. In their long grey macintoshes they looked like miniature grown-ups. It didn't look like the kind of place where people from another planet would choose to land. A bizarre image of a silver flying saucer – all flashing lights and fins – descending on to the village green popped into Chris's head. Take me to your leader. Or more likely, Take me to your wine bar, if the people he'd met were representative of the race.

‘I’ve arranged to meet the Major’s contact in the pub.’

‘You do surprise me,’ Chris commented, and started to unpack.

‘Doctor, I just don’t see how these incidents are related.’

‘Nor do I, Chief Inspector, but it’ll be interesting finding out, don’t you think?’

Harris was pacing his office, whisky glass in hand. ‘You’re suggesting that someone is kidnapping people off the streets of London in a black cab.’

‘I rather suspect that it’s the cab itself that’s doing the stealing.’ He ignored Harris’s look of astonishment and took his hat off and idly spun it on his finger.

‘People disappearing just as others appear. Turning up without pasts.’

‘Turning up dead.’ Harris went to take a sip of his drink, but the glass was empty. Bridie had returned from his investigation to confirm that the dead boy was indeed Eddy Stone, although the sergeant hadn’t learnt much more than that. Harris stopped pacing and turned to face the Doctor. ‘My sergeant thinks you should go back to your hospital – mind your own business and leave well alone. Actually, I rather suspect that he thinks you’re a few shillings short of a pound.’

‘I know more than just a couple of people who would agree with him.’

‘If you’re trying to reassure me, Doctor, you’re not doing a very good job of it. Look I only have your word that people are disappearing. I only have your word that there is some mad taxi out there eating people up.’ The look Harris gave the Doctor clearly said that his word didn’t currently count for much.

‘So why are you still talking to me, Chief Inspector? I do hope that you’re not merely humouring me. I should be upset.’

Why indeed? Harris considered. The Doctor had withheld the information about the dead boy, Eddy Stone. And the story about the taxi was, frankly, ridiculous. But at the end of the day the Doctor was his last hope. Harris had realized some weeks ago that he wasn’t going to get any further with this case on his own. It jeered at the basic principles of police work.

‘I don’t want to lose this one, Doctor. I don’t want to have the strangest case I’ve ever encountered snatched out of my hands. It’s not so much that I do believe you, but that I don’t have anything else to go on.’

The Doctor stood up, and exhaled. ‘But are you ready for where it may lead you, Chief Inspector? Shall we go?’

Harris was baffled. ‘Go? Where?’

‘I think it’s time that you met a friend of mine. Or rather a friend of Eddy Stone’s.’ The Doctor’s eyes twinkled. ‘And then we might try and hail a taxi.’

‘There’s one good thing about being a widow,’ Patsy murmured absently as she tugged her wallet out of her suit trousers, ‘you don’t have to keep asking your husband for money.’

Chris stopped in his tracks, just as they reached the door of the pub. ‘I didn’t know you’d lost your husband. I’m sorry.’

Patsy stood in the open doorway for a moment, her back to Chris, framed by the soft light of the saloon bar. Then she turned around, with what looked like a brave smile on her face. ‘Don’t be. It was a long time ago. Five years.

I’m a different person now. Come on, let’s find this contact of the Major’s.’

Every eye in the pub turned to look at them when they entered. The conversation actually stopped for a few long seconds. Chris tensed; half expecting a burly local to swagger over to them and snarl, *We don’t like strangers here.*

However, no one did. Patsy stared aggressively back at the men who eyed her up as she made her way to the bar to order drinks.

‘You’d think they’d never seen a famous person before,’ she said loudly, as Chris joined her.

‘Actually, Patsy, I think it’s the suit.’

Patsy laughed heartily, turning several heads. She appraised Chris’s flashy clothes. ‘Yes, you might have something there, I don’t think even the people around here still wear Zoot suits.’

Chris blushed. ‘No, I meant your su– What? Are my clothes out of date?’

She reached over and played with the wide lapel of his jacket. ‘Christopher baby, if this were 1948, you would be the height of London fashion. However, I think most Zoot Suiters are claiming their pensions. I mean where do you buy your clothes? The Shop That Time Forgot?’

Chris made a mental note to personally jettison the TARDIS wardrobe. He paid for the drinks and they took a corner table. After being in the pub for only 75

a few minutes, a thin-framed man in his early fifties, who introduced himself as Pop, sidled across from where he had been playing dominoes with a few other men. ‘I’ll meet you outside, five minutes,’ he whispered, without once looking directly at them, and then headed off in the direction of the Gents.

‘Well you wouldn’t exactly make detectives,’ Pop scolded, when he found them waiting amidst the beer crates at the back of the pub.

Chris decided not to say anything.

‘Half the village is talking about you two.’ He spared a particularly harsh look for Patsy. ‘Women wearing suits – I ask you! You might do that sort of thing up in London, but not around here.’

Despite his gaunt face and stooped frame, Chris guessed that Pop was a military man. Something about the casual way that he took charge, behaving as if his opinions were absolute truths and therefore not negotiable. Chris could tell that Patsy had taken an instant dislike to the man and was preparing her own brand of sarcastic retaliation. Ever the peacemaker, Chris got in first.

‘We’re here as a favour to the Major, and are acting on his behalf. I appreciate that we could have been a little more inconspicuous, but we’re here now.

What do we need to do?’

Pop looked Chris up and down, and then nodded, grudgingly accepting this.

He scratched at his stubbly chin for a moment. ‘It’s all set for tonight. Here’s where we’ll meet. . . ’

The Petruska Psychiatric Research Institute.

From the clinical notes of Julia Mannheim, MD PhD.

Strictly Confidential.

Case #541.

The mannequin is lying sprawled in a plastic chair. The director is standing in the corner of the room, looking impassive. He's sweating. Perhaps he's tense? I've never been able to tell what he's thinking or feeling. But I doubt it can be optimism.

The director walks over to the Toy which is lifeless, naked and limp. I can't help feeling nauseous just looking at it. It's like a shop window dummy, only instead of being firm and solid, it's soft, as if somehow it's been melted. With the support staff redeployed, there's no one here to tend to them. Its flesh is beginning to discolour and is sagging around its joints.

The director lifts the Toy and holds its dead weight clumsily in his arms.

The director is a physically large man: tall, thickset and muscular. But even he is struggling.

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Then the change begins. I've witnessed this over a hundred times and I'm still transfixed. Only now the awe I feel is mixed with revulsion. One moment there is only a pale expanse of shapeless flesh and then a woman is standing there. The transformation is instantaneous. It happens so quickly that you're only aware of it afterwards. We've slowed the process down with a camera –

which is terrifying. Its features emerge as though its face has been pushed out from the inside of an inflated balloon. The surface of its face stretches to accommodate the new features. Slits in its face appear – tiny rips that form into a woman's eyes, nostrils and mouth.

It's always the same woman. I don't know who she is. And I've never dared ask the director. She's quite flawless. Chiselled features, raven black hair that's so thick that it could be feathers. It's that perfect beauty that makes you ache.

The director takes the newly made woman in his arms, and moves to

kiss her. She looks tiny and brittle in his great treetrunk-like arms. And then – and this happens every time – she opens her almond-shaped eyes, catches sight of him, flinches, and begins to scream. She lashes out with her fists, kicks him repeatedly in the knees, tries to bite his face. She twists like a trapped snake, using every ounce of her strength to get out of his embrace.

The director roars with anger. And beneath the angry cry there is something else. A wail like a wounded animal. Simple, inarticulate pain. He throws her to the floor – hard. She cries out and, like a struck dog, makes a desperate graceless scramble for the corner of the room. Away from him, her defiance evaporates. She pulls her knees up to her chest and her cries become softer, quickly dissolving into whimpers. And as her moans lose their harsh edge, so her features begin to blur. They don't completely vanish, just start to melt, until they're only floating on the loose skin of her face. The mannequin's head lolls forward drunkenly. Lifeless. A doll. An outsized child's toy.

The director stares at the one-way mirror – no, he must be staring through it, because he is looking directly at where I am sitting.

'Another failure,' he roars at me and storms out of the room.

It's over. That was Director Moriah's last experiment. The Petruska Programme is finally over.

Julia Mannheim snapped the folder shut and threw it on to the desk in front of her. She hurried over to the door of the darkened observation room and fumbled for the light switch. The room filled with electrical light. With the lighting in the two rooms reversed, the window to the therapy room darkened, becoming impenetrable blackness.

As Julia Mannheim began to gather up her papers, klaxons sounded in the corridors outside.

77

What now?

Leaving her bundle on the desk she made her way into the long empty corridor. A window looked out on to the Institute's grounds. The unkempt gardens looked peaceful and still in the light from the Institute. She heard the sound of one of the guard dogs barking excitedly.

'Oh, no,' she whispered. 'Another breakout. That's all we need.'

Julia Mannheim tugged her white labcoat more tightly around her stocky torso and bustled off down the corridor. She failed to notice the two veiled female figures enter the therapy room. A moment later they left the room, supporting the crumpled woman between them, and disappeared into the shadows.

The siren began as a low wail, rising in pitch and intensity before almost dropping away to nothing, only to begin the cycle over again. It came from somewhere within the metal perimeter fence.

'Here we go.' Patsy pushed herself away from the tree she'd been leaning against, smoking. She looked alert, ready for action.

Chris scanned the patches of night sky visible through the trees. Searching for lights reflected on the dark clouds, for any indication of a ship in the heavens. There was nothing.

Following Pop's instructions, they had taken the West road out of the small town, leaving the country road to trace the perimeter fence of an old hospital.

Patsy had remained quiet throughout their journey, a serious expression on her face. Chris hadn't seen her so intent and businesslike before. Their journey had ended at the edge of a small wood by the metal chain fence of the hospital.

It seemed an unlikely place for a craft to land. He considered the alternatives: time corridor technologies, perhaps? an artificial wormhole?

The outline of a figure approached from the other side of the fence. Chris slipped behind a tree and was about to motion for Patsy to do the same, when he saw that she had already moved out of sight. The figure was at the fence now. It was still too dark to make out who it was, but Chris could see that he was dragging something heavy behind him. He heard, rather than saw, the fence move. There must be a breach in it somewhere.

If the newcomer turned out to be unfriendly it would be easier to engage him when he crossed to this side of the fence. He looked around for a weapon, just in case. The floor of the wood was a thick sludge of wet leaves and was littered with small branches. None were large enough to use as a club. Without weapons, their best bet would be to set an ambush. The classic manoeuvre would be for him to step out and distract the target whilst Roz slipped around behind them and. . .

He closed his eyes and gently rested his forehead against the trunk of the tree. Grief winded him, it couldn't have hurt more if he'd been physically punched in the stomach. Tears pressed at his eyes, and he let them run down his face.

Goddess, he'd forgotten about her. He'd not thought about her since the train journey. How could he have got so caught up in things that he could forget her? So caught up in just living. He imagined Roz angry with him for being able to do anything at all. He should be mourning her, not running around the English countryside. What was he doing here? Alone. Just him and an alien woman hiding in a cold Essex wood, waiting for more space refugees to drop out of the sky.

Oh Goddess, I shouldn't feel guilty for just being alive, should I?

Patsy's voice distracted him. She'd stepped out from behind her tree, and was striding confidently over to the fence. A torch was directed at her, a stab of light in the dark forest, bleaching her face electric white.

Chris saw his chance and slipped around the other side of the tree, aiming to get behind the torchholder. Shouldn't be a problem now his attention was focused on Patsy. Chris was coming up behind the newcomer when the torch was turned on him.

'I wouldn't try creeping up on me, lad,' a familiar voice warned.

Chris tensed. So much for taking him by surprise.

Pop turned the torch on himself, its light cast ghoulish shadows across his craggy face. He grinned, evidently pleased with himself at having avoided their trap. 'Now give me a hand. These two weigh a ton.'

Pop indicated a hospital gurney, which stood, incongruously, next to him.

Its wheels were caked with mud. Two people were strapped to it, lying head to toe. An elderly white woman and a small Chinese boy – who couldn't have been more than four years old. Their eyes were closed. Drugged, thought Chris. They'd have to be to sleep through the bumpy ride across the field.

What *was* going on? These people were inmates of the asylum. They were even wearing straitjackets, for Goddess' sakes! Pop was dressed in an orderly's uniform.

What had he got himself involved in? Chris turned from the trolley to face Patsy.

Her face was illuminated by the orange glow of her petrol lighter as she lit a cigarette. She caught sight of the expression on his face and snapped, ‘Don’t start, Chris. We can talk about it later. Let’s just get out of here.’

‘The missus is right,’ Pop grunted, and took hold of one end of the gurney.

‘The guards will have let the dogs out. And worse.’

Chris sighed with angry resignation and gripped the other end of the trolley and started to pull it aggressively across the forest floor.

* * *

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Moments later, a shadowy figure quietly slipped through the tear in the fence.

It paused for a moment, as if sniffing the air. And then it headed off in the direction Chris and his party had taken. Keeping low to the ground, it moved smoothly and silently over the forest floor.

‘Why do I get the feeling that your young friend doesn’t like me?’

The Doctor didn’t take his eyes off Jack, who was walking a dozen or so yards ahead of them on the dark Soho street. ‘Well, Chief Inspector, you *are* a police officer.’

‘You’re suggesting the young man has something to hide?’

The Doctor risked a glimpse at the policeman before turning his gaze back to Jack. ‘Everyone’s got something to hide.’

Harris considered this for a moment. It was late and the streets in this part of town were quiet. They’d been following the young lad through the quieter streets of Soho for a good few hours. Bait, the Doctor had said, for his trap.

Throughout the exercise the Doctor had looked nervous, anxious even. He’d been careful to keep the lad, Jack, within sight all the while. This in itself had been no easy task; the smog was spread thickly and unevenly over the city.

Frequently, they'd turn a corner only to find that the blankets of white cloud had all but swallowed him up.

It was becoming obvious to Harris that the dead boy and this lad had been more than just friends. The Doctor had made a telephone call from the station and they'd met up with the boy outside one of the queer pubs on Charlotte Street. Harris had felt uncomfortable just standing outside it. He hoped none of the regulars had seen him. He'd been part of the team that had raided it the month before. They'd arrested three of them in the toilets that night. Three.

In one cubicle. Filthy business. The Doctor appeared completely unaware of any of this. Made you wonder.

'You're worried about the boy, aren't you?' Harris began, not exactly sure where he was taking the conversation.

'I don't want anyone to get hurt,' the Doctor replied. 'Anyone else.'

'He's being very brave for. . . well, for one of them.'

'Pardon?'

'You know. Well, they're not really men at all, are they? Unfortunate devils.'

'Chief Inspector, what are you talking about?'

'Doctor, you are aware that your young friend is almost certainly a homo-sexual.' It was not a term Harris was comfortable using. In fact, it was the first time he'd ever said the word out loud.

'I'd rather gathered as much.'

'I see.'

The Doctor appeared to forget Jack for a moment, turning in exasperation to look at Harris. 'What? What is it that you see, Chief Inspector?'

Harris didn't get a chance to reply. A black cab turned the corner on to the road ahead. He immediately knew that this was their quarry. Something about the way it moved.

'I think I see your black cab, Doctor.'

‘What?’ On catching sight of the vehicle, the little man immediately left Harris’s side and hurried down the road to catch up with Jack. The cab was a little further ahead, wreathed in smog. Harris could see the railings of Soho Square beyond the taxi. The light on the cab roof blazed emerald, its headlights icy white. The rest of the vehicle was just thick, unreflective blackness.

The Doctor stepped protectively in front of Jack, and ushered the boy back to where Harris was standing. They exchanged wary glances, before both turning to watch what the Doctor was up to.

The little man was standing in front of the machine, silhouetted between its blazing headlights. He looked small and vulnerable in front of the fender of the large car. If the driver chose to put his foot down now. . .

‘Hello,’ Harris heard the Doctor say. Absurdly, the little man doffed his hat at the machine. ‘I’m the Doctor, and these are my friends. I’ve been looking forward to meeting you.’

The black cab came to a stop a few yards ahead of him. It moved so smoothly that Harris thought it could have been skating on ice.

‘Now what manner of creature are you, hmm?’ The Doctor’s voice was an awestruck whisper. He sounded as if he was actually expecting a reply.

The cab didn’t reply, of course. Harris became aware that it was moving almost imperceptibly from side to side. He was struck by the impression that it was making its own evaluation of the Doctor. As if it were sizing up the pathologist.

‘How can we communicate?’ the Doctor said, frowning. ‘You don’t seem to be able to talk, and I can’t be sure if you can hear me. Which is a shame, because I think you and I need to share a few words about road safety, if you catch my drift?’

The vehicle slid forward a few inches at this remark. Harris hurried forward to join the Doctor in case the driver should try anything. He noticed that Jack reacted identically to the threat to the Doctor, keeping pace with him.

Close up, Harris could see that the cab’s surface wasn’t metallic at all, but was matt and looked as if it might be tacky to the touch. Even the windows were dull and opaque. It was almost as if it were only a plastercast of a real car. Just a moulded shell. He began to reach out

to the cab, before thinking better of it and pulling his hand back. He glanced up at the Doctor. ‘Do you think there could be someone inside?’

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It was Jack who answered his question. ‘Don’t be stupid. How could anyone get in there? It’s completely solid, like a jelly.’

Bloody insolence. ‘When I want your opinion, young. . .

man,’ Harris

started, unable to hide the disdain in his voice, ‘I’ll ask for it.’

‘I hate to interrupt you both,’ the Doctor began quietly, ‘but could you give me a hand? I’m afraid our friend here has taken a shine to one of mine.’

Harris felt a chill sweep through him as he caught sight of the Doctor’s arm.

He was vaguely aware of Jack gasping in horror next to him.

The Doctor’s left hand had disappeared beneath the surface of the cab’s bonnet. All around his wrist a moist black *something* was pulsing, slowly and rhythmically.

And then it began to suck the Doctor inside itself.

82

Interlude

Gilliam’s Story

Gilliam had dreamt of the song. In her dream there had been words. Words full of answers, but too faint to grasp their meaning. She woke with the taste of the desert in her mouth. It reminded her of eating sandwiches on a beach with her family when she was a little girl, the grit crunching loudly in her skull.

It took her a few moments to orientate herself to her surroundings. For the last twenty-five years she’d woken up in a bed the size of a small swimming pool, surrounded by attendants waiting patiently to prepare her for the business of the day. Waking up alone on a thin roll of bedding in a thermo-tent was going to take some getting used to.

Gilliam got up and stretched her aching joints in the cool of Petruska's bedchamber. The privacy was priceless though.

Before continuing her work she walked around the ruins. Guards had been positioned around the ancient palace at discrete intervals. The king's orders, no doubt. She had to admit that she was surprised that he hadn't had her physically dragged back to his side.

There was a small commotion further down the slopes; two guards were trying to stop an angry group from climbing further. Gilliam pulled her hair out of her eyes, it was a multi-media crew. She thought she recognized the reporter. An odious woman who'd written a lurid and *very* unofficial biography of her the previous year. She hurried back under the protective canopy of the ruined palace.

The easy successes of yesterday were not repeated. The computer didn't manage to repeat its miraculous performance. The screen of Gilliam's terminal was littered with possibilities and the software's 'best guesses'. By lunchtime, Gilliam was beginning to think that she was constructing a piece of fiction rather than recovering a true account.

She started to doubt her own abilities. She'd spoken to Ala'dan of this when he visited her at lunchtime, bringing food – which she'd accepted – and a servant – whom she'd refused. Ala'dan hadn't commented on her behaviour directly – to presume to judge the queen would be an act of treason. But Ala'dan had reported that he'd never seen the king more angry and upset; 83

that the king thought that she was deliberately choosing to humiliate him.

Gilliam chewed morosely on some of the food that the old chancellor had brought for her. Why was she doing this? Who did she think she was to single-handedly undertake an archeological project? She had a college kid's knowledge of archeological theory; her only claim to practical experience were the two college digs she'd attended all those years ago.

She turned back to the screen. At the top, the translation from the previous day still sat. She'd cleaned it up a bit, or rewritten it, depending on your point of view.

My name is Petruska, First Queen of Kr'on Tep, Ruler of the Seven Systems, and I am a prisoner in this place.

I know how you feel, Gilliam thought, and then set to work. After a few fruitless hours of word-play she abandoned the translation software, dug out a notepad and struck out on her own. By the time the sun was sinking below the horizon, she had filled a quarter of her pad, and the next section of the hieroglyphs on the wall were – well, translated no longer accurately described her work. Interpreted was probably closer to the truth.

She was reading through the paragraphs of text, when she heard someone politely cough behind her. She knew it was her husband before she turned and saw him.

He was standing by the entrance to the chamber, looking healthy and strong and as huge as ever in the deep orange light of the evening. He was wearing the simple robes of business; he'd probably come straight from a state meeting. His face was carefully neutral. Expressionless.

Any minute now he was going to start bellowing at her.

But he didn't. Instead, he made a show of considering the ancient chamber.

'This is my home,' he said. 'I can trace my family back through the generations to this room. I am descended from Moriah and Petruska's first born. I am king, because of them.' He sounded as if he were reciting by rote, but it wasn't any speech Gilliam knew. He looked at her directly for the first time. 'Just as you are queen.'

'That's –' she started, but had to clear her throat. Would she always feel so intimidated by him? 'That's why I'm here.'

'Oh?' He raised an eyebrow. A bitter smile flickered uncertainly across his face. 'And I thought you were running away from me. No?'

Gilliam didn't know what to say. Not once since she had fled the *Jewelled Sword* had she considered that the king might take her leaving personally.

She'd assumed he would be angry at her disobedience. Angry, but not hurt.

She sighed, sat down heavily and put her head in her hands. 'I've been such a selfish bas–'

‘Ssh.’ He gently silenced her apologies, and sat down beside her. He picked up her notepad and scanned a couple of pages. ‘Tell me what you’ve been up to here,’ he asked in a husky whisper.

‘You’re not going to like it.’

‘Funny, Ala’ dan said the same thing.’

Gilliam took her notepad from her husband and told her story. When she explained about her discovery of Petruska’s secret diary hidden in her love song, he looked genuinely interested. Interested and impressed.

She read the last section of her reconstruction: “‘These hidden words that I paint on the walls of my room are my only voice,”’ Gilliam quoted. She paused after scanning the sentence that followed: “‘I live in terror of Moriah.”

’ Out of the corner of her eye she saw the king flinch as if the words were describing him and not his ancient ancestor. She continued: “He allows me to do nothing, to go nowhere, to meet no one, to talk to no one. Before he chose me as his bride I was a scientist, but now I am not permitted to work.

His jealous love is suffocating me.”

‘I haven’t finished working on the next section yet. But I’m fairly sure that Petruska plotted to. . . escape from Moriah. I think she enlisted her bodyguard’s help in her plan, but I’m not sure.’

‘How sure are you of any of this? Since I was a boy I have been taught about Moriah, the man-god. An honourable and powerful warrior who killed his queen for her infidelity and fled Kr’on Tep in his grief. Are you certain that all those historians have it wrong?’

Pretty damn uncertain, Gilliam told herself, but she said, ‘I’m working on my own, and I’ve only been working on this for a day, but. . . yeah, I’m pretty sure.’

The king clambered noisily to his feet. Gilliam took a deep breath. If there was going to be a row it was going to happen now.

However, the king merely turned to her and nodded. ‘What you’re doing is important. We need to know where we come from. How else can we know the direction of our lives?’

He pulled her to her feet, and stroked her cheek with the back of his thick fingers. She noticed for the first time that there were flecks of grey in his beard.

‘When your work is over,’ he said, ‘you will come back to me, won’t you, my queen?’

She smiled and pulled him into her arms, burying her face in his beard.

She’d forgotten that he was still in love with her.

‘Of course, I’ll come back,’ she reassured him. Although, in her own mind, she really wasn’t sure.

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6

You’ve Never Had It So Bad

Harris couldn’t take his eyes off the Doctor’s. . . off what remained of the Doctor’s arm. The surface of the cab around the Doctor’s forearm glistened, like wet tar. Harris felt sick. At the moment it appeared to be content just to pin him down, but, like a cat toying with a bird, at any moment it might swallow the little man whole.

‘Now is not the time to keep quiet about any bright ideas you may have.’

The Doctor stole another glance at his arm, and then looked away, grimacing.

Harris was reminded of a patient unable to watch as a nurse took a blood sample.

The cab slurped once, and gulped down another few inches of the Doctor’s arm.

The colour drained from the Doctor’s face. ‘Ooh, that tickles,’ he murmured.

Harris steeled himself. ‘What should I do?’

The Doctor grimaced. ‘Nothing hasty. I can’t move my arm at all. It feels as if it’s stuck in concrete. It’s going numb. Try pulling my other arm.’ He spoke out of the side of his mouth, as if he were a family

doctor and the cab a patient with whom he didn't want to share a bad diagnosis.

Harris moved slowly around to the other side of the Doctor. He took hold of the Doctor's arm. It felt wiry and muscular through the fabric of his jacket.

Tougher than he looks, Harris thought.

Without any leverage, it was hard to put all his weight into pulling the Doctor out. He heaved, leaning away from the Doctor.

'No good.' The Doctor shook his head.

Harris jumped slightly when he felt Jack slip his arms around his waist and tighten his grip. If Bridie could see him now. . .

Together they pulled again. Harris felt something give. At first he thought that the cab had released the Doctor's arm. Instead the strange vehicle had released whatever it used for brakes, and was simply allowing them to drag it along the road behind them. It was impossibly light, not like a real car at all. They must have cut an absurd picture: the three of them pulling the large vehicle effortlessly along the road.

'I suspect a rethink may be in order,' the Doctor commented. 'This isn't 87

getting us very far at all.'

Harris grunted and let go of the Doctor's arm. He was relieved when Jack removed his arms from around his middle.

The Doctor yelped and hurried past them. It took Harris a second to work out what was happening. Despite them all having stopped when they realized that they weren't going to be able to free the Doctor's arm simply by pulling, the cab hadn't stopped with them. Instead it had continued to crawl forward, eagerly swallowing the Doctor's arm as it went. The Doctor was now frantically backtracking down the road, the cab clamped to his upper arm. It swung left and right as the Doctor tried in vain to shake himself free.

Harris froze. Over two decades of policing the Capital had left him woefully ill-equipped for moments such as this. He had no idea what to do at all. The cab was like a fish, and the Doctor's arm a line. But the fish was too strong and now the angler was being pulled in. Oh

Christ, a shark. That was what the strange vehicle reminded Harris of. Thrashing as it bit down on its victim.

The Doctor had backed all the way to the edge of Wardour Street. Even after midnight there were still a few cars on the road. Harris shouted a warning and the Doctor whirled around to check the road for himself. As he did so the cab was swung out on a wide arc. The Doctor must have seen his chance because he continued to spin on the spot, describing a circle with the cab on the end of his arm. He spun three hundred and sixty degrees, the huge shape of the taxi pulling impossibly on the end of his arm.

The Doctor looked like a shotputter, only he was preparing to throw a car.

A whole bloody car!

The Doctor spun faster like a figure skater, carving out a delicate manoeuvre on the ice. Illuminated in the unnatural green light of the cab's roof light, the Doctor looked like a leprechaun twirling in the eye of a hurricane. In the eerie light, Harris could see the lines of concentration etched deeply into the Doctor's face.

A small man in a tweed jacket spinning a monster on the end of his arm.

'Get away,' the Doctor cried. 'Get off the street.'

Harris climbed on to the first few steps of an office building. Jack hurried further down the road, until he reached the iron fence which bordered the gardens of Soho Square. The young lad hauled himself over the railings and then, anxiously, turned back to watch the Doctor.

Unable to compete with the centrifugal force, the cab slithered down the Doctor's arm, hung on to his wrist for a few moments and then was flung from him, like a stone out of a catapult.

'Bombs away!' The Doctor cried. The huge box-shape of the cab hurtled straight down the middle of the road –

– and passed through the railings of Soho Square like a boiled egg through 88

an egg-slicer, swallowing down a surprised Jack Bartlett in a single gulp.

The Doctor fell to his knees and let out a cry of a single word. ‘No!’

Chris trudged through the forest, pulling the gurney behind him. Patsy was supposed to be pushing the other end, but he couldn’t feel her contribution.

The going was hard and every time the trolley became stuck in the under-growth, he felt anger rise in him. What the cruk was going on? What the hell was he doing liberating English mental patients? He was about to turn on Patsy, vent some of his pent up feelings, but he didn’t get a chance.

Pop let out an unearthly scream and collapsed. Chris whirled round to see blood erupting from his neck. The old man toppled forward; a long twin-pronged spear was protruding from the back of his neck. He blinked several times and opened his mouth, trying to speak, but only succeeded in vomiting volumes of thick, dark blood.

‘Oh shit!’ Patsy yelled and backed away from the fallen man. She took one look at the spear, swore again, and then turned and sprinted away through the trees.

Chris shouted after her, but if she heard him she didn’t reply. A wave of anger rose up inside him at Patsy’s desertion. Roz would never have –

Stop it, he told himself. Just stop it. Don’t start making comparisons.

He hurried over to Pop, keeping low, and scanning the surroundings for any signs of the attacker. There was nothing.

The old man was awash with blood. The wounds at the base of his neck were deep. Even if Chris had some field dressings, which he hadn’t, he doubted that he could do anything to help unless he could get the old man to a hospital.

A second spear thudded into the rotten wood of a fallen tree inches away from where Chris stood. It was clean, shining silver in the darkness, like a surgical instrument.

There wasn’t time to think. In one fluid movement, Chris threw himself forward into a well-practised dive. He cursed himself for leaving his armour and his gun in the TARDIS. He was going to have to face his attacker with his bare hands.

Weaponless and alone. He was an Adjudicator’s nightmare. If you’ve

no partner then you've no back-up. You're vulnerable. Exposed.

He came out of the dive in a fighting stance, facing the direction in which the spear had come, and praying to the Goddess that he was going to be lucky.

Something hit him in the face. Hard. The force of the blow knocked him backwards and off his feet. He felt himself crash into something metal and heavy – the hospital trolley. It toppled over, straps breaking, sending its occu-89

pants flying. One of its sharp metal edges dug painfully into the small of his back, making his eyes water.

He was clambering to his feet, blinking away tears when the second attack came. His knees crumpled beneath him. It felt more like being run over than being punched.

Whatever it was, it wasn't human.

Gotta get up, gotta get away, gotta run. But the pain in his head was completely disorientating. His body would only allow him to lie still and take shallow breaths.

Something rolled him on to his back. Chris opened his eyes and it swam drunkenly into his vision. It was crouched over him, its blank face only inches away from his own.

Blank face. No features. Just flat cream flesh.

Blank hands reached for his face. For his throat. Smooth pale fingers with no fingernails.

Blank.

The Doctor scrambled to his feet, scraping his hands on the tarmac in his desperation to get after the cab. He was sure of only one thing. That he wasn't going to lose anyone else. Not tonight. Not ever.

It had been a terrible risk to use Jack as bait. Secretly it had terrified him.

If he'd been better prepared, if he'd had more time, then he could have put together a tracking device. He could have hunted it down alone and put a stop to its macabre work. But he hadn't been able to find a trace of the vehicle. He hadn't been able to find a solution on

his own. As ever, he needed people to help him put his plans into action. People who trusted him, who were willing to risk themselves for his plans to succeed.

Fragile companions to lure the monsters out of the shadows, while the Doctor activated the trap.

But there hadn't been a trap tonight. Tonight he'd been improvising. And the show wasn't working out the way he'd envisaged it.

He barely noticed the iron railings as he jumped them. Soho Square was in darkness. The light from the streetlamps was heavily filtered out by the tall, overgrown trees.

'Come on,' he hollered, standing in the city garden. 'Show yourself!'

Nothing. There was a small structure in the middle of the square. Fake Tudor beams and a pointed roof. Its place in the architectural history of the planet escaped the Doctor for the moment. He circled it, hoping to find the creature on the other side.

No luck.

Was it possible that the cab had left the square? No. It couldn't have passed 90

through the railings with Jack inside it. Not if it planned on keeping him in one piece. The Doctor grimaced. Best not to follow that line of thought.

He still knew nothing about the nature of the creature. His arm was coated in a thin film of grey slime, which smelt faintly of aniseed and hospitals. An anaesthetic perhaps? Or was that just wishful thinking? Was he just clutching at any sign that Jack might still be alive inside that creature?

He had one trick left. The oldest in the book. It never failed with power-mad conspirators hell bent on ruling the Universe. Time to see how it worked on monstrous cars.

'Scared to come out and face me?' The Doctor goaded, filling his voice with as much contempt as he could manage. 'Scared of a man with only an umbrella to defend himself?'

Silence. Perhaps the creature was cleverer than it looked.

A voice called out to him. For one crazy moment he thought that it might be the creature itself. It was Harris. The policeman was still on the other side of the railings, pointing excitedly to the other side of the gardens. The Doctor set off at a run, his battered spats making slapping noises on the path.

It had been hiding in the shadows of the trees which lined the perimeter of the gardens. The creature must have seen the Doctor racing towards it, because its headlights suddenly blazed and it moved off towards him, picking up speed.

This is what happens when you don't make plans, the Doctor told himself.

When you don't cheat the future by leaving messages for yourself. When you chuck away the hint file and don't take a peek at the answers page.

Then it's just you and the monsters.

Sorry Roslyn.

The cab was almost upon him. The Doctor took a deep breath and launched himself into the air. For a second he was blinded by the bright lights of the car and then he felt the chill darkness envelope him as the creature welcomed him inside itself.

The blank-faced creature jerked suddenly, its arms flailing in the air, and then it crashed down on the ground next to him, lifeless.

Chris looked up from the brink of unconsciousness to see Patsy standing over him. She was holding the brake of the gurney in her hand.

She'd come back.

'What?' she asked, catching sight of the expression on his face.

'Nothing. How's Pop?'

Patsy just shook her head. She tossed the metal bar away. 'We need to get out of here. Quickly. Can you walk?'

'Do I get a choice?'

* * *

‘Doctor!’

The cab swung around hungrily at the sound of Harris’s voice, searching him out in the darkness. For a moment he thought that it had missed him, but then it turned towards the iron railings where he stood.

Oh no.

Harris let go of the railings, turned and ran, not daring to look back. He couldn’t help imagining what would happen to the Doctor and the boy if the car decided to repeat it’s egg-slicing trick with the railings.

Its headlights illuminated the road beneath his feet. His shadow appeared in front of him, a giant stick figure stretching out wildly as the car caught up with him. He didn’t have a hope of escaping it. How could you outrun a car?

He glanced over his shoulder and gasped. The vehicle was at the edge of the gardens, racing towards the iron fence. Harris winced; he really didn’t want to see this.

And then just before it hit the fence, the creature lifted itself off the ground, and jumped the railings with the casual confidence of a prizewinning race-horse.

Harris was too stunned to move. The cab shot down the road towards him. At the last possible moment, it swerved around him, took the corner of Wardour Street at a casual fifty miles an hour and was gone.

It hadn’t wanted him. Harris was left standing alone on the suddenly quiet street.

The black cab was a solid lump of thick, dense jelly. It had invaded his body through his nose and mouth, forcing its sleepy fingers down into his lungs and stomach. Jack had tried to struggle against the antiseptic sweetness that swept through him, but how could you fight something that encased you completely?

He allowed himself to lie suspended in the gelatinous mass of the black cab.

Floating in jelly, like a sliver of orange rind in ajar of marmalade.

Give up. Just give up and let it have you.

He'd seen the monster hurtling towards him and he'd frozen, like a rabbit caught in the headlights of a lorry. He hadn't even tried to get out of its way.

Maybe he hadn't cared enough to. Eddy was gone. They were going to put him away for the amount of money he'd stolen to pay off Gordy Scraton.

That's if the Law got the chance. If Gordy Scraton and his psycho brother didn't get to him first.

Better just to let the monster have him. Why not?

Because there's work to be done, Jack Bartlett. Unfinished business that needs attending to.

Strong hands gripped his wrists through the thick swamp.

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'Doctor!' Jack tried to shout out his new friend's name, but only succeeded in vomiting up some of the goo inside of him. The Doctor had come for him.

He felt soft lips press against his own.

Doctor?

And then the Doctor blew a lungful of sweet, life-preserving air into his body, expelling the invasive material from his chest.

Sleep, the Doctor's voice said, somewhere deep in Jack's mind.

So Jack slept.

'Piss off,' Patsy told the man in the bowler hat. 'This compartment's full.'

The man turned scarlet at the insult. For a moment he looked as if he were about to launch into a tirade of middle class outrage, and then he caught sight of the two sleeping figures in loosened straitjackets on the floor of the carriage and hastily made his exit.

'Thank you,' Patsy said to the retreating figure, her voice full of syrupy sweetness.

They hadn't returned to the guest house to retrieve their luggage. Although Patsy had bemoaned the loss of her favourite cocktail dress which was in her suitcase, Chris had been adamant that he wasn't going to face the wrath of Mrs Hardly, not with two escaped inmates from the local asylum in tow.

His eye was swollen and bruised. The cut on his back ached. Chris perched on the edge of one of the carriage benches, pulled his shirt off, and tried unsuccessfully to look over his shoulder to assess the damage.

'Here let me,' Patsy pushed him roughly around until she had a clear view of his back. Her hands were like ice on his skin: goose-bumps rose on his arms.

'I don't think it's serious, just badly grazed. How's your eye?'

'Sore.'

'They don't pull their punches.'

'They?' He started to turn around, but Patsy stopped him.

'I'm not finished here. It isn't easy cleaning a wound with only spit and a hanky.'

Chris winced. 'Nice. Well I suppose your saliva is mostly alcohol.'

She slapped him on the back. 'Booze! Of course! Why didn't I think of that?'

Chris glanced over his shoulder. Patsy had pulled out a quarter bottle of whisky from the inside pocket of her suit jacket. There was an inch of brass-coloured liquid in the bottom of the bottle. She poured a little on to her handkerchief and was about to tuck the bottle away, when she obviously changed her mind and stole a quick nip.

'You drinking that stuff this early?'

'Listen, Christopher, when you drink as much as I do, you have to start early.'

She set the bottle down on the floor and pressed the handkerchief against the wound. Hard.

‘Oww! That burns.’

She grinned sadistically and tucked the hanky away in her jacket. ‘Good.

All done.’

He lay back on the bench, aware that Patsy was studying him carefully. He noticed her eyes drop to appraise his bare chest. He managed to stop himself flexing his muscles. But only just.

She ran a finger down the middle of his torso, through the six-pack of hardened stomach muscles and then paused at the top of his belt. ‘Impressive. You must spend your whole life doing sit-ups,’ she said.

Her eyes didn’t leave his, but he felt her fingers rest heavily and deliberately on his belt buckle.

Chris shivered. It felt somehow sacrilegious, although he didn’t know why.

Maybe it was just too soon after Roz’s death. ‘I can’t –’ he started. ‘Don’t.

Please.’

Patsy removed her hand quickly, as if something had bitten it. ‘I said I liked it, I didn’t say I wanted to kiss it,’ she snapped at him and lit a cigarette.

Silence. Chris pulled on his shirt. The cold and wet material slapped uncomfortably against his skin.

Patsy tended to the sleepers. She made an unlikely nurse. It had been hard work dragging them on the broken gurney to Healey’s tiny railway station.

For most of the journey, their cargo had been silent and motionless, like mannequins. Occasionally, the Chinese boy would stir and whimper in pain. Patsy would pause to whisper words of reassurance to him.

The first train back to London had not been until six in the morning, so they had set up camp in the waiting room on the station platform. The light in the waiting room wasn’t working and they had sat silently in the dark for hours listening to the soft breathing of the sleepers. A

thousand questions about them had formed in Chris's mind, but he'd been too exhausted to try to articulate them.

He took the last swig of whisky from the bottle and jammed it down the side of the seat. He wasn't too tired to ask the questions now.

'I was expecting them to appear out of nowhere. Dropped out of a spaceship or something. Materializing in a patch of coloured light at the very least. Not be dragged across a muddy field on a hospital trolley.'

'You'll find we're full of surprises,' Patsy said, curtly.

'But running on empty as far as answers are concerned.'

Patsy frowned at him. 'What exactly do you want to know?'

Chris thought about this for a moment. 'Everything. That faceless creature.

What is it?'

She shook her head. 'I don't know what it is. That's the truth!' she added angrily, when she saw him looking at her. 'They're a kind of guard. There are several of them at the hospital.'

Chris couldn't think of another way of saying this. 'They're alien. They don't belong to this world.'

'I know.'

'Do they come from Petruska?'

'What? No, of course not. Does that thing look like me?' she shouted, and then suddenly became more reasonable. 'I don't think that we're the first aliens brought to the hospital.'

She turned the light in the carriage out. The first traces of dawn were creeping across the English countryside, turning the blinds on the carriage windows a delicate blue. Chris was surprised when Patsy lay down next to him on the bench. She kept her back to him, but pushed herself against him.

His immediate reaction was to put his arm around her. When she spoke he felt her voice reverberate gently through his body.

‘We came here looking for refuge. Liberation.’ She spat the word out, as if it hurt to have it in her mouth. ‘But your people found us. Found out about us and our abilities. And then we were slaves again.’

Chris wanted to say that the humans of this century weren’t *his* people, but held back, not wanting to interrupt her. ‘What did they want to use you for.’

Patsy sighed. ‘They discovered our therapeutic value. Our empathic abilities allow us to enter into emotional relationships with people who are otherwise unreachable. Those who are “not available for contact” through ordinary psy-chotherapeutic interventions.’

That explained the asylum. ‘You mean people with psychotic disorders, don’t you?’

Patsy nodded. ‘Pop was an orderly at the hospital. He’s been helping us escape from the asylum for some time now. It’s ironic; on our planet we were the toys of the neurotic rich, then we “escaped” to Earth only to become the companions of the mentally ill.’

‘Out of the frying pan. . . ’ Chris started and then stopped himself. It occurred to him that this must be the second journey Patsy had made from Healey to London. He looked down at the sleepers. ‘How many more of your people are left in the hospital?’

‘I’m not sure. The Major would know. He and Mother have been responsible for bringing them to London, helping them make new lives. I don’t see how we can help those left behind now Pop is dead.’

Chris hugged her tightly. ‘I know someone who will be able to help,’ he whispered.

Patsy hadn’t heard him. She was searching the floor of the carriage with her hand.

‘Where’s my drink?’ she said anxiously.

‘I finished it. For your own good.’

Melanie Wotton had been the cleaner at Healey station ever since she had left school. She arrived at the station at six-thirty every morning to wash down the platform, water the plants, and disinfect the toilets.

She knew most of the drivers and ticket collectors on the early trains, sharing a smile and a few words with them in the few minutes while the train was standing on the platform.

After finishing cleaning the platform for the morning, she was about to pour the soapy water in her bucket on to the track, when she caught sight of the figure lying sprawled between the rails of the Westbound line.

It was one of the ticket collectors. A young shy lad, who always had his nose in a book. He hadn't been at the job long. Just a stop-gap, he always said, before he went to university. Adam. That was his name. He wouldn't be going to university now.

His sightless eyes stared back at her. His uniform had been removed and fresh blood bled on to his string vest from two ragged wounds on his neck.

Melanie let her bucket and mop drop. She was still standing in silence, shaking and breathing in desperate gasps, when the station staff found her five minutes later. As they walked her slowly back into the station house, dirty soap suds from the spilt bucket spread across the clean station platform like a miniature flood.

As the first Westbound train of the day continued on its journey to London, it rattled past a level crossing where a London taxi waited patiently to continue on its way towards Healey. And in the guard's van of the train, a uniformed figure stood silently in the shadows.

96

Interlude

Gilliam's Story

On the third day, Gilliam woke to great commotion. She pulled on her work clothes and climbed out of her thermo-tent to find a couple of dozen people milling around Petruska's chamber, bringing in equipment and setting up living quarters. The arrangements reminded her of her own college days: despite the different cultures it was still recognizable as an archeological dig.

A rounded, bearded man appeared to be directing the proceedings, scolding younger members of his team – for getting in his way – and generally fussing.

When he caught sight of Gilliam, he bustled over as fast as his short legs would carry him.

'Highness,' he began and bowed low. 'An honour to finally meet you. I'd heard of your interest in the discipline, but if I'd known it was so –' he gestured around the ancient chamber '– active, I would have had the university approach you myself.'

Gilliam cut him off with a sharp flick of her hand. 'The king sent you here, didn't he?'

The short professor was sweating in the morning heat, but that wasn't why he looked so uncomfortable. 'I received a request from the royal barge last night to give your Highness whatever assistance necessary for you to complete your work. I was working out in the K'tum Pi desert, an investigation into the palace ostraca of the Ker'ana Ton Warriors. Most of it is soldiers' love poetry –

very erotic stuff. You may have read my work on the subject?'

Gilliam shook her head; she was beginning to feel like a little girl who hadn't finished her homework assignment.

The professor wiped his sweaty, red face with his handkerchief and then stuffed it back in the pocket of his robe. 'To tell you the truth, this early period isn't an interest of mine. With so much written on the first family it's hard to find a new angle – to really make one's mark.'

He turned to look at her again and smiled approvingly. 'Which makes your work all the more special, Highness. I took the liberty of reading through your field notes, when I arrived. Very promising. You do seem to have stumbled across something of real interest and importance though. Treasonable declarations from the first queen of Kr'on Tep hidden in her love songs. You 97

may have uncovered a proto-feminist covert communication network. Who knows what messages may be hidden in the other songs of the period? Quite astonishing.' He tapped his chin thoughtfully, considering something. 'Proto-feminist covert communication network,' he said, quoting himself. 'I like the sound of that.'

He paused, as if struck by a new thought, and looked a little guiltily at his queen. 'The university will want to recognize your vital contribution to this discovery, of course. An honorary doctorate perhaps? Perhaps even patron of a college?'

‘Professor.’ Gilliam cut through his stream of words.

He stopped talking and blinked at her. ‘Yes, Highness?’

‘Get out.’

‘I’m sorry?’

‘You have two minutes to get yourself and your colleagues out of here. And if you personally say another word I shall treat it as an act of treason. Is that clear?’

The professor opened his mouth, and then closed it again. He nodded.

‘Good. I see that we understand each other.’

She watched him gather up his research team, who looked completely bemused at having to leave before they had even finished unpacking. But in one and three quarter minutes, Gilliam was alone in Petruska’s chamber.

Very promising, indeed! The patronizing git. She burst out laughing, and then remembered the king’s part in all of this and her laughter quickly died.

He’d arranged for the professor and his researchers to come just to speed up her work, no doubt thinking that when the translation was complete there would be nothing to prevent her from taking her place by his side on the *Jewelled Sword*. Nothing to stop royal life returning to normal.

Gilliam picked up her notepad and flicked through her field notes. Exciting as the work was, it wasn’t Petruska’s ancient story that was keeping her away from her husband. If she was honest with herself, she had to admit that she hadn’t run away to do archeology – she’d run away from him. And when the work was over, she wasn’t going to have anything to hide behind. She was going to have to make a decision.

But not yet, she told herself. Not today.

For the rest of the day she buried herself in the translation. Petruska’s song was spread across all five of the walls of her chamber. By the end of the day, Gilliam had finished translating the symbols on four of the walls. All but the last two choruses of the first queen’s love song for her husband.

Much of the journal was concerned with a device which Petruska was building with the help of her sole companion and bodyguard, a young man called Tol'gar, whom she had taken into her confidence. The device was represented 98

by two symbols: a bird in flight, and a circle or possibly a sphere. Petruska variously referred to the device in her journal as 'gateway' and 'opening door'.

A secret means of escape perhaps? A way of fleeing Moriah's tyranny?

Gilliam hoped so. She was beginning to feel close to the first queen of Kr'on Tep, despite the centuries that separated their lives. She could empathize with Petruska's confinement of course. In her years as Queen of Kr'on Tep, Gilliam had all too keenly felt the imprisonment Petruska described in her journal.

But their lives weren't the same; to suggest they were only undermined the first queen's experience. Petruska had been a real prisoner, forbidden any contact with the outside world, locked in this luxurious gaol that was her palace. However trapped Gilliam felt, she could leave. Unlike Petruska, she had a choice.

No, that wasn't quite right. Petruska had also had a choice. To choose to disobey, to fight, to try to escape her abusive husband. And she had chosen wisely; using her scientific knowledge to create a device, a machine to deliver her from the mysterious man-god, Moriah.

Gilliam couldn't help hoping that the academic histories had got it wrong.

That Moriah hadn't killed Petruska, that she had used her device to escape.

But that was just wishful thinking.

It was late in the evening when Gilliam finished translating the fifth wall.

The temperature had already dropped substantially. She would shortly have to finish her work for the day or else risk hypothermia.

Much of the later journal entries referred to the functioning of the bird/globe device, which appeared to be nearing completion. Gilliam couldn't make any sense of the technical details, although she wasn't surprised by this.

It was the last part of the journal which caught her attention: *And tonight I sleep above the bird/globe waiting only Tol'gar's return We'll caress the birds*

And in the safety of the mountain we'll pass through the opening door Entwined

This was the first time Gilliam had come across a direct reference to the location of the device. She rubbed the chill out of her arms; it had been almost an hour since the sun had sunk below the horizon, and the desert was cooling rapidly. She really ought to seal herself into her tent for the night, but she couldn't bear to stop working after reading the last journal entry.

I sleep above the bird/globe

According to the many reconstructions of the palace, Petruska's bed would have been situated in the centre of the room. Probably a large, canopied affair, much like Gilliam's own aboard the royal barge. The bed, of course, was long gone. The floor of Petruska's chamber was decorated with small hieroglyphs; according to the musicologists these represented harmonies which 99

complemented the melody etched into the walls.

There were four bird/globe symbols on the floor, marking out the points of a rectangle.

Caress the birds

Ten minutes later, Gilliam was ready to give up. She'd tried tracing each of the symbols in turn to no avail. She'd tried pressing them one after the other in every possible combination – still nothing.

She slumped down on the floor and hugged her knees. What did she think she was doing anyway? Searching for secret doors like Nancy Drew. She ought to pack up and go home and leave it for the professor to write his papers about.

She sighed. Time for bed. She read back her translation notes as she walked over to her tent. The last paragraph of Petruska's journal was different in style to the technical reports which preceded it. Almost poetic and filled with hope and. . . love. Gilliam tried to imagine what it would have been like for the queen and her bodyguard lover, to be together in this room. Secretly working towards the day when they would escape through the gateway. It must have been terrifying.

Exciting too.

We'll caress the birds

Together

Suddenly Gilliam knew how they would have entered the mountain. She ran back to the centre of the room and kicked off her heavy boots. By stretching herself out like a starfish, she was just able to reach all of the bird/globe symbols at the same time. She pressed them.

Together.

The ground shuddered once and Gilliam felt rather than heard ancient ma-chinery grind into action. The rectangle of floor on which she was spread-eagled began slowly to descend. Dragging her down into the mountain. Down to the bird/globe, the gateway, the opening door. And away from her thermo-tent and the protection it provided from the night cold.

Gilliam shivered as she sank into the darkness.

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7

On Being Sane In Insane Places

Julia Mannheim had slept badly, waking in her room at the Institute feeling as if she had only just put her head down on the pillow. Feeling cheated of the benefit of a good night's rest, she ran a hand through her disheveled hair as she padded through the labyrinth of corridors of the old asylum building.

She had only managed to get to bed in the early hours after the alert over the escape had finally died down. The director hadn't actually seemed to be that concerned when the security team had reported their usual failure.

He'd just murmured that the matter was in hand in that quiet voice of his.

Well, at the end of the day he was the one who was accountable for all the research equipment. As assistant director, her responsibilities were focused on the organization of the research team. When it came to the Toys, it was his head on the block. Still, the idea of one of the

Toys stumbling across the countryside unsettled her. They weren't likely to hurt anyone, but they might give some poor soul the shock of their life.

The sudden suspension of the project by the government had left all their work half done. The prospect of another long day of tying up administrative loose ends did not inspire her. Julia entered the Institute's morgue where two corpses were laid out on adjacent slabs. A juvenile male and a mature male adult. She added another note to her mental list of things to do. She would have to arrange for the regular delivery of sample human tissue to be discontinued.

One of the sample human tissues sat up suddenly and grinned goofishly at her.

Julia Mannheim yelped and, much to her later embarrassment, sprinted for the door.

'Hello there,' the mature male adult called after her. 'I'm the Doctor. . . ' he started, and tried to stand, but his legs buckled under him. He clutched the side of the bench to support himself. 'And. . . I feel terrible.'

Julia Mannheim had seen some strange sights in her time at the Institute, but reanimated corpses beat everything.

'You're supposed to be dead,' she managed, edging back into the room.

'People are always saying that to me. I shall get a complex,' the naked man 101

said, hanging on to the bench. 'I wonder, could you help me? My legs don't seem to be working.'

He made an appeal to her with his large, droopy eyes. 'I won't bite.'

Julia sighed, unable to resist a patient in distress. She crossed the room and hooked her arms under his shoulders and lifted the naked man back on to the slab. He seemed completely oblivious of his own nudity. She covered him with a white sheet.

Julia's mind was racing. How the hell had this happened? If she were in a college hospital she would have assumed that she was the victim of a medical student prank. It was a frequent occurrence back in the States – but out here in the middle of the English nowhere?

‘Now, would you mind telling me how you came to be lying in my morgue?’

His brow furrowed and he blinked in surprise. ‘I was rather expecting that you were going to be the one to do the explaining.’

‘Me?’ Julia looked at him: he appeared to be quite serious. ‘What have *I* got to explain?’

‘Everything. Why you’re kidnapping people off the streets of London will do for a start. Then I’d like to know what that black cab is? And how you’ve managed to create something far beyond the technology of this planet in the mid-twentieth century? Who’s helping you?’ he added, fixing her with a hard stare. ‘Aliens? The government? What do they want? Hmm?’

Julia felt her heart sink. He wasn’t a zombie: he was a patient. One that was clearly lost, deep in a psychosis. The poor man was hopelessly and clas-sically delusional. He must have been left behind when the last experimental ward was closed and the patients were transferred to the mental hospital at Chelmsford.

A misplaced schizophrenic, playing dead amongst the corpses. Damn, that was all she needed. Didn’t anyone bother doing a head count when they bussed the inmates out?

She patted him sympathetically on the arm. ‘Don’t worry, we’ll get you sorted out. I’m going to have to leave you here for a moment while I go and find someone who’ll arrange to have you taken to your new home.’

He was staring back at her, thoughtfully. ‘You’re patronizing me. How interesting. You don’t know what I’m talking about, do you?’

Julia felt her training kick in. ‘No. The things you describe aren’t real. They only exist in your mind. They’re part of your illness. You won’t have had your medication today, will you? Damn, your records will already have been transferred. I’ll have to phone Chelmsford and get them to have a look at your medication requirements. Can you tell me your name?’

The naked man had started muttering to himself, something about barbarism and twentieth century psychiatry. He glanced up at her in response to 102

the question. ‘My name? How much time do you have? A literal

translation has thirty-eight syllables – or at least it did last time I counted. And anyway, mine keeps changing. Call me the Doctor. Everyone does. Where are my clothes?'

Time for some reality confrontation. 'You think that you're a doctor? If that's true, why are you lying naked in a mental hospital?'

'I'm not a doctor. I'm *the* Doctor,' he snapped, clearly annoyed.

It was quite common for a patient to feel anxious and angry when the safety of a delusion was being threatened by rational confrontation. Julia found herself wondering how long it would take for an ambulance to come and pick him up. It wasn't as if she didn't have other things to do.

'But why am I lying naked in a mental hospital? It's a good question,' he continued. 'As I said before, I was rather hoping you were going to tell me.

Feel free to gloat while you explain your plan. Well?'

'I think that you may have been left behind when the coach took the other patients to your new home,' Julia said, patiently. 'This facility is being closed down.'

The patient who believed that he was a doctor shook his head and looked puzzled. 'No, that's not the right answer. The last thing I remember was being inside the gelatinous creature. I put myself into a trance. Jack too.' He wagged his finger excitedly in the air, as if suddenly remembering having left something in the oven. 'My goodness, Jack!'

Wrapping the sheet around himself, he hopped off the slab and – legs apparently recovered – hurried over to the juvenile male on the next bench. Julia was taken aback when the Doctor made a good approximation of a medical examination, checking the corpse's vital signs. Julia couldn't take her eyes off him. There was something deeply charismatic about the little man. His personality was magnetic – a well-documented but little understood side-effect of certain categories of schizophrenia.

The patient nodded to himself, apparently satisfied with the corpse's progress.

'He's out of the trance now, just sleeping. He'll be fine.' He rubbed his hands together, as if preparing to get down to business.

Julia thought that his delusions were both absurd and tragic.

'Now, on to more immediate concerns. I need to prove to you that I am not one of your patients. How can I prove to you that I'm quite sane?'

'You can't.' Julia blurted out, before she could stop herself – the idea was ridiculous. More softly – more professionally – she added, 'You don't have to prove anything. You *must* be one of my patients. After all, you're here, you're describing things that can't possibly exist. What else could explain the situation?'

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The man sighed and started speaking rapidly to himself, as if working through a problem out loud. 'Words won't convince you, you'll just take them to be symptoms of my malaise. Let's try working with physical evidence.'

He turned to look at her again, and Julia was shaken by the intensity of his gaze. He looked like a professor gently trying to explain a basic concept when he'd much rather get on with something more interesting. 'I take it you don't recognize me?' he said, after a moment.

Julia decided to go along with him. 'No. But I haven't spent much time on the men's ward. My work was mostly with juveniles.'

'Ha!' the Doctor erupted, his face suddenly brimming with excitement.

'Then my friend here should be known to you?'

'Hardly. Your "friend" isn't a patient here. He's part of a regular supply of human material we use for research purposes. He –' Julia realized she was in danger of colluding with the patient's perceptions. 'Rather, this *body* was brought here from the local cottage hospital. Despite your protestations to the contrary, this boy is long dead.'

'Touch him.'

'I'm sorry?'

'He's not dead, only sleeping. Touch him. His name is Jack Bartlett and he is a friend of mine. Last night we were attacked and brought here against our will. Take his pulse – you'll find that it's a little slower than normal, but not dangerously so.'

Julia joined the man at the other table. She was going to have to handle this delicately. Completely breaking apart a firmly held delusion could often cause a patient distress. Sometimes, although not frequently, inducing a violent response as the carefully constructed fantasy was shattered, leaving the patient in a world they no longer understood.

The juvenile male's body was motionless. Its skin was very pale, almost grey and its eyes were sunken. She reached for its wrist, preparing to go through the motions of taking its pulse in order to attempt to bring her patient's perceptions into line with reality.

The hand was warm.

The man noticed her surprise and raised an eyebrow in question.

She felt the pulse of the 'corpse' push softly against the skin of her finger.

Faint, but regular. The boy was alive.

The Doctor smiled, reassuringly. 'Welcome to the real world,' he whispered.

Chris sat up and hugged the army surplus bag around his skinny waist. It was cold in the trench. Through the smoke he heard the distant sound of shells falling. The Doctor lay beside him, fading badly. His ashen face was creased with pain. Bullet wounds kept appearing and disappearing on the Doctor's 104

body, oozing thick dark blood down the front of his shirt before vanishing, only for the cycle to start over again.

'The future,' the Doctor wheezed, 'and so much left undone.'

'No!' Chris tried to pick up the Doctor, but huge cracks appeared in his body and he turned to dust in his arms. The dust flaked into the floor of the trench, merging with the dark puddles of mud.

'No!' Hopelessly, Chris tried to scoop up the Doctor's ashes.

He screamed as a hand broke the surface of the muddy trench floor, pushing its way up into the air. Chris watched in horror as a young man pulled himself out of the floor of the battle-trodden trench and collapsed, naked as a newborn, beside him.

‘Is it. . . It is time.’ The young man’s voice was soft and full of wonder. His eyes lit up, innocent and the purest blue.

‘No!’ Chris yelled, pushing the young man away, wanting to push him back into the ground where he had come from. ‘No, it isn’t time. Bring him back.

Do you hear me? Bring him back!’

The light above the trench flickered once and then failed. The sky went out like a light bulb.

A long silver spear flashed in the darkness.

Chris woke up sweating and disorientated. He was in the carriage on the train. The blank-faced mannequin which had attacked him in the wood was standing over the sleepers. Absurdly, it was wearing a ticket inspector’s uniform.

A long silver spear flashed in the darkness.

Julia Mannheim sat, resting her head in her hands, at one of the functional tables in the deserted staff refectory of the Petruska Psychiatric Research Institute. She watched as the Doctor busied himself in the kitchen; he seemed to be taking an awfully long time making two cups of coffee.

There had to be a rational explanation for what had happened. A reasonable explanation. One that didn’t involve body-snatching. The details of the Doctor’s story weren’t clear: Julia still wasn’t sure who had been driving the taxi, but the idea that the ‘human material’ came from the streets of London horrified her.

She would have dismissed the Doctor’s tale out of hand, except she couldn’t find a more convincing explanation for the boy. Compared to their American counterparts, British hospitals were quite disorganized and Julia had never had much faith in them, but even they didn’t make basic mistakes like that.

If only she could find the director: Moriah would be able to sort this situation out. It was his responsibility after all. But the director wasn’t in his office, and there was no answer from the telephone in his private quarters.

The Doctor pottered over from the kitchen, wearing the striped pyjamas which Julia had hunted out from one of the empty wards. He was carrying two cups of frothing coffee in his hands.

'Cappuccino!' he declared proudly. 'Not easy with only a battered saucepan, an egg whisk and sterilized milk. We'll have to manage without powdered chocolate, I'm afraid. Now, how are you feeling, Doctor Mannheim?'

'Julia, call me Julia please. Doctor Mannheim always makes me think of my father. I'm a little shocked to be honest. It's not everyday that I share morning coffee with the dead.'

'Or discover that someone in your organization is kidnapping people, perhaps killing them. I rather suspect that Jack and I weren't supposed to survive the trip from London.'

'Jesus H Christ,' she breathed, and closed her eyes. 'I'm still having a lot of difficulty believing that, I'm afraid.' Julia opened her eyes to see the Doctor staring thoughtfully at her. Evaluating her. Did he think that she had something to do with this?

'Look, you need to speak to Professor Moriah,' she began, detesting the de-fensiveness in her voice. 'He's responsible for liaison with the other hospitals.

I just can't believe that this is happening. This is supposed to be a hospital for Christsakes!' She rooted through her lab-coat pockets until she found her cigarettes. Her hands were shaking as she tried to light one.

'I imagine it was easier when you thought that I was delusional.'

Julia giggled nervously, something she hadn't done since she was a little girl. She was embarrassed at how quick she'd been to diagnose the Doctor.

'I'm sorry about that. You've got to admit that you're pretty eccentric.'

If the Doctor was offended by her remark, he didn't show it. 'I should like to know about this. . . Institute. How did a nice American psychiatrist like you come to be working in an English asylum?'

'I was working with Carl Rogers in Wisconsin. Moriah poached me, offering a great salary and my own research team. It was only when I arrived in England that I learnt the full extent of his work.'

‘Oh yes?’ The suspicion in the Doctor’s voice was evident.

Julia shook her head impatiently. ‘No, nothing like that. Quite the reverse.

He had only just started on his work then, but what he’d developed was astonishing.’

The Doctor leant forward, clearly interested. ‘What? What had he developed?’

Caught up in her own enthusiasm, Julia stood up and nodded at the door.

‘Come on, I’ll show you.’

* * *

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Chris was wide awake in a second, instinctively leaping into action. He pushed himself off the bench, knocking Patsy on to the floor as he did so, causing her to swear loudly. He made a clumsy leap at the blank-faced creature who stood straddling the sleepers.

Chris caught the side of the bloody spear as it came down for the second time, knocking it out of the creature’s hand. He had a second to act before it was going to pummel him to death with those impossibly powerful fists.

Keeping low, Chris rammed his shoulder into its stomach and succeeded in knocking it over backwards on to the far bench in the carriage. A cry escaped from it. Primal and furious, like a half-made child. It made Chris shudder.

He stole a glance at the other occupants of the carriage. The oldest sleeper –

the woman – was writhing on the floor, her back arching and her arms flailing wildly around her. Blood poured from the spear wounds on either side of her throat. She appeared to be only vaguely conscious. Her eyes were closed. She was going to die and there was nothing Chris could do to save her. Now he needed a plan to keep the rest of them alive.

He was surprised to see that Patsy had already gathered the young

boy up in her arms and was heading for the door. Her face was stern; she looked frightened but determined. Like an Adjudicator.

'Quick,' she snapped, 'stay behind me and for Goddess' sake keep it away from the child.'

The faceless creature was already clambering to its feet. Chris slammed the carriage door behind them and headed off after Patsy and the boy. Running along the tight corridors of the train felt like running through a fun house, the movement of the train kept undermining his attempts to stay firmly balanced.

That would be a serious problem if it came to hand-to-hand combat.

The train was almost deserted. Just a few people scattered throughout its winding length. Chris hoped that they had the good sense to keep out of the creature's way or else things were going to get very messy. He called to them, telling them to close the blinds that looked on to the long corridor, and to keep quiet.

Patsy was opening the door to the last carriage when they heard some passengers start screaming behind them. 'Guess who,' she said, grimacing.

'Are we just running blindly or do you have a plan?'

'You're the policeman. Don't you have one?'

Chris shook his head. 'No. I mean apart from just generally staying alive.'

'Fine. We'll use my plan then.'

Summer sunlight streamed into the ward from the large Victorian windows through which the ornate gardens of the Institute could be glimpsed. The room resounded with laughter and the sound of children playing, happily and 107

unselfconsciously. The ward was full of couples. Mothers and sons, lovers, brothers and sisters – everywhere the Doctor looked people were paired off.

No one in the room was alone.

Two young girls ran up to him, all pigtails and giggles. He raised his hat, but they ignored him, haring off suddenly in the direction of a

playhouse.

‘You don’t have to be polite to them, Doctor,’ Julia Mannheim said, standing next to him. ‘They’re not real.’

The Doctor opened his mouth to reply but changed his mind. He meekly followed Julia over to a bed at the far side of the room.

The occupant was a boy of no more than twelve, dark-haired and fast asleep. His elfin face looked troubled even in sleep; his brow was furrowed and his lower lip protruded slightly. ‘Benjamin,’ Julia said, indicating the boy.

To the Doctor, her voice sounded artificially neutral, as if she were trying to prevent herself expressing strong feelings.

In a high-backed orthopaedic chair next to the bed, someone had placed a life-size doll. It was blank-faced, like a giant artist’s mannequin. It made an absurd hospital visitor. The Doctor moved forward to investigate it, but Julia held him back.

‘Watch,’ she said.

The boy’s face twitched as he began to stir. The mannequin jerked into life as if struck by a bolt of electricity. Moving more slowly, it leant forward and began to stroke Benjamin’s hair.

‘Ben was a manic depressive who suffered intense panic attacks,’ Julia said, quietly.

‘Was?’ the Doctor asked.

Julia didn’t respond to this remark.

As the boy woke, the mannequin by his side began to develop the features of a young human male. The blank-faced doll was now a fresh-faced, care-free teenager; perhaps two years older than the boy in the bed.

‘Hi Ben,’ the newly made teenage boy said. ‘I’m Ned. Let’s be mates.’

‘I’m impressed,’ the Doctor murmured.

‘Don’t be,’ Julia said quietly, taking a small device from her lab-coat pocket.

It was the remote control unit the Doctor had seen her use to activate

the three-dimensional hologram. All movement in the room ceased. One of the girls whom the Doctor had encountered earlier had been in the act of jumping from the roof of the playhouse when Julia put the whole scene on pause. Now the little girl hung motionlessly in the air, three feet above the ground – her knees tucked up beneath her and an expression of wild glee frozen upon her face. The child was a ball of energy just waiting to burst back into life.

The Doctor took in the rest of the frozen faces and bodies in the room. It was as if someone had stopped time, stealing all the noise and activity from 108

the room. The Doctor took the small device from Julia and peered at it.

'This could take all the fun out of musical statues.'

'Don't worry, it couldn't affect a real person. I've only frozen a pre-recorded three-dimensional image. The scene you've just witnessed was recorded here last summer.'

The Doctor coughed, politely. 'I was joking. I know exactly what this machine does. I also know that it is far beyond the technology of even the great-est Earth scientists. And I should know, I've thrown together a few of these myself. I suppose the person who made this is also responsible for those chameleon mannequins?'

Julia nodded. 'This is all Moriah's work. He'd already begun developing the Toys before I joined the Institute.'

'Toys?'

Julia smiled, and looked a little embarrassed. 'Our nickname for the mannequins. They're genetically engineered therapy instruments. Our aim was to create an artificial yet responsive individual who would facilitate therapeutic relationships with the mentally ill.'

The Doctor considered this. 'Therapy without therapists. Very clever.'

'It was a medical revolution!' Julia exclaimed, the pride evident in her voice.

'My work with Carl Rogers in the States had been focused on the qualities a therapist needs to engender positive therapeutic change in their patients.

Rogers discovered that those conditions were empathy, unconditional positive regard and genuineness on the part of the therapist. Moriah was able to sew those qualities into the genetic fabric of the Toys. We built our own therapists.'

The Doctor went to put this hands in his pockets, realizing too late that he wasn't wearing his jacket. Feeling awkward, he locked his fingers behind his back instead. 'This is different to psychotherapy though, isn't it?'

'Yes, it is. Much more. The Toys can empathically sense who the patient needs around them and actually *become* that person. If a patient is severely emotionally and developmentally damaged and needs to be reparented, the Toy will respond by becoming a mother or father. We had our best successes with patients whose illnesses were triggered by a bereavement. With the Toys, we've been able to bring the lost person back in order for the patient to work through their unresolved issues.'

The Doctor closed his eyes, unable to prevent himself imagining Roslyn Forrester's features appearing on the face of one of the Toys. His throat became dry and he swallowed uncomfortably. 'I see,' he whispered hoarsely. It was all he could manage.

Julia didn't appear to have noticed his discomfort. 'The Toys have also provided physical care for their patients,' she said, 'releasing friends and family of the mentally ill from any caring responsibilities. It was this aspect of their 109

design which assured that the Institute was able to secure major government funding.'

'I can see that would be politically attractive,' the Doctor murmured, recovering his composure. 'So what went wrong?'

'Some of the Toys became. . . unreliable. Anti-therapeutic.'

'Anti-therapeutic?'

Taking the remote control from the Doctor, Julia pressed a button and said,

'Watch.'

The whole ward fast-forwarded crazily around them as Julia searched through the holographmatic recording. As night spiralled into day and

back again, half-glimpsed images flickered across the Doctor's vision – it felt as if he had fallen into a video recorder.

Julia slowed the recording to show scenes of Benjamin and Ned playing football, building a den and watching movies together. The last image was of Ben and Ned in the ward, where they were teasing some of the other patients and Toys. The boys were being aggressive and rude; Ben hovered slightly behind Ned, looking pleased to be getting into trouble.

The hologram froze – the words FILE 786: JONES, BENJAMIN. FILE STATUS: CLOSED appeared floating in the air in front of them. Julia deactivated the device and the hologrammatic scene faded to reveal the now silent ward. The beds and equipment had all been removed, only the blank-faced mannequins remained, littered throughout the room. A forest of dormant Toys. Some were slumped in chairs, others stood with their heads resting on their chests, several had collapsed on to the floor. The summer sunshine had disappeared with the hologram, in the cold grey of the early October morning the flesh of the mannequins looked loose, pale and stained.

Once loved, now abandoned, like forgotten children's toys. The Doctor smiled grimly to himself. Julia was speaking again, he struggled to listen to what she was saying.

'Ned became more rebellious and difficult – reacting to some deep desire in Benjamin no doubt – daring him to do increasingly mischievous and dangerous stunts.' She paused and took a deep breath before continuing. 'Benjamin was killed when Ned encouraged him to climb on to the roof of the Institute.'

There were tears welling in her eyes as she spoke. 'Our fault. My fault.'

The Doctor turned away from the Toys to look at her. 'And so the government closed the project down?'

Julia nodded and walked over to the window. 'We're just mopping up now.

Most of the Toys have been destroyed. These are all that remain. Well, except for –' she stopped herself.

The Doctor sighed as several pieces of the puzzle fell into place. 'Except for those that escaped.'

Julia looked startled. ‘How could you know about that?’

He joined her at the window. Outside the trees had lost most of their leaves.

No one had bothered to rake up the fallen leaves which had been left to form a soggy brown carpet on the lawns.

The Doctor put his hand gently, tentatively, on her shoulder. ‘Oh I think I’ve found your Toys. Or rather I’ve found what’s left of them.’ He told her about the mysterious killings in London. About the victims with no pasts and only one significant but new relationship in their lives. When he finished his account, he looked at her directly and asked, ‘Did you arrange the deaths of the Toys in Soho, Doctor Mannheim?’

‘No.’ She shrank back a little under the Doctor’s piercing gaze. Julia was shocked at how important the Doctor’s approval had become to her in the short time that they had known each other. ‘No, I didn’t. I didn’t know that the Toys that had escaped had reached that far.’

The Doctor’s grey eyes probed her for a long moment, and then he turned back to the window, apparently satisfied with her reply. ‘So who did? Moriah?’

‘Doctor, don’t confuse the Toys with human beings. We’re in the middle of deactivating all the Toys. Destroying them. It’s not as if they’re real. They can’t be murdered. If Moriah is deactivating the Toys which have escaped then he’s acting within his remit. But I can’t believe he could have anything to do with you being brought here or kidnapping anyone else off the streets.’

‘Can’t believe it or won’t?’ the Doctor snapped.

‘There must be a rational explanation.’ Julia was aware that she was almost pleading.

‘Of course there is,’ a new, deep voice whispered from the doorway.

Julia whirled round to face the newcomer. Moriah stood by the open door to the ward, his large body almost filling the doorway. His heavy features set into a frown. Julia was almost overcome with relief: perhaps now this whole misunderstanding could be cleared up?

‘Director,’ she began, ‘I’ve been trying to get hold of you all morning. The strangest thing appears to have happened. . . ’ Her voice trailed away and she found herself completely lost for words. How could she possibly explain the events of the morning? She was searching for the right phrase – for any damn phrase! – to introduce the Doctor, when she heard a door behind her swing closed.

The Doctor had vanished.

Patsy’s plan was insanely dangerous and was going to get them all killed, but Chris hadn’t been able to come up with anything better at the time. As he lowered himself, gingerly, out of the window of the door in the guard’s van, he was suddenly deluged with alternative possibilities.

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The train must have been travelling at least sixty miles an hour. At this speed, the wind was like a hurricane, howling in his ears, ripping through his clothes, pushing him back along the side of the train. It felt as if someone had turned a firefighter’s hose on him.

He risked a quick glance up. Patsy was staring at him, a look of deep concern on her face. She gave him the thumbs up and then disappeared back inside.

This wasn’t going to work.

There was a short ladder just to the right of him, designed to give engineers access to the roof of the train. Although, Chris suspected, not usually when the train was travelling at top speed. He reached out with his right hand, leaving himself hanging from the window with his left. The ladder was just out of reach.

Typical.

He was going to have to swing for it. One handed and into the wind. No trouble. At this speed he would be torn to shreds by the ground if he fell.

Pulling up on his left arm, he threw his weight against the wind and stretched out with his right. His fingers touched the edge of the ladder, and he scrabbled desperately for a grip. For a second he thought he was going to fall back, but his grip held and he pulled himself across until he was hanging from the ladder with both hands and he anchored his feet on a rung.

For a long moment, he allowed himself to stand on the ladder, fighting against the wind which threatened to rip him from it. Then he lowered himself down until he was level with the huge metal wheels of the train. The mechanism which locked the two carriages together was huge and covered in old, dry grease. If he had a laser cutter he could burn through the old metal in seconds, allowing the last carriage to separate from the train.

But he didn't have a laser. Only a wrench Patsy had liberated from the guard's locker. He stepped from the ladder on to a small ledge between the two carriages. He was partially sheltered from the wind and he could concentrate on his task.

Patsy's plan depended upon him being able to separate the guard's van from the other carriages of the train. It had made sense in theory. She would act as bait, luring the faceless creature into the last carriage. Assuming the creature complied, she would then climb on to the roof of the train and cross on to the penultimate carriage and signal Chris to separate it from the last.

Well, it had made sense at the time.

What he wouldn't give for his armour and fully-charged plasma rifle.

The locking mechanism was remarkably simple. Nothing more than two giant claws clenched together, like two ogres holding hands. A bolt was screwed 112

tightly through the clenched grip, keeping it in place. Chris fitted the wrench and set to work loosening it.

The bolt turned quickly and easily. Despite its dirty appearance, the thread was well greased and in a few moments the bolt twisted off, bouncing once on the undercarriage of the train before spinning away into the early morning countryside.

Now all he had to do was loosen the grip of the claws. He braced himself against the side of the last carriage and pulled. He suddenly realized that he was still sitting on the last carriage. If he did manage to separate the trains he was going to go sailing off with only Mr No-Face for company. Chris grimaced, he didn't like the idea of that at all. He changed sides and prepared to pull at the claws again. He felt the claws begin to loosen at the same time as he noticed the ribbed cables, like gas mask pipes, running between the carriages.

The ribbed cables were vacuum tubes, part of the braking mechanism

of the train. If they were ruptured and the vacuum inside disturbed, all the brakes on all of the carriages on the train would immediately be employed. Their entire purpose was to prevent carriages becoming separated and running away.

The truth struck Chris like a slap in the face. There was no way to separate the carriages without bringing the train to an emergency stop.

Someone jumped between the carriages, landing heavily on the other side.

He heard Patsy call his name. The signal.

The plan wasn't going to work. The creature was going to be able to – He glimpsed something in a dark grey uniform leap across the gap after Patsy, finishing the thought for him. He heard it land heavily and firmly on the roof of the penultimate carriage. Chris almost dropped the wrench in his hurry to get to the ladder and climb on to the roof.

The wind was harsher, tears streamed from his eyes. The roof of the train was wet and slippery, its surface broken every few metres by torpedo-shaped ventilators which protruded a few inches into the air. The creature had its back to him, advancing on Patsy, who was trying to back away as fast as she could without risking slipping on the wet surface.

He shouted obscenities at it, trying to attract its attention. He wasn't even sure whether it had the ability to hear at all. If it did hear his words, it didn't react to them. It kept stalking Patsy, one of its metal spears held high in one hand, the other stretched out in front of itself for balance.

Chris started to run. It was ridiculously dangerous, the power of the wind threatening to whip him from the roof. His leather-soled shoes kept threatening to slide out from under him. Even if he caught up with them, it was only going to take one punch to send him sailing from the train.

Up ahead, the creature made a lunge at Patsy; she threw herself back, landing awkwardly. It had a hold of one of her ankles and was starting to pull her 113

towards itself.

Goddess, it was going to kill her in front of his eyes. Why had he

listened to the Doctor? Why hadn't he sneaked an energy weapon out of the TARDIS

with him like. . . like Roz always used to.

Roz had never really believed that you could fight evil without weapons, without killing in turn. She'd always thought the Doctor's ideals were just so many words, that he was out of touch with reality. Live by the sword and die by the sword. That had been her motto.

And she had.

A long desperate snarl of grief erupted out of Chris. He threw the heavy wrench over-arm, it spun on its axis straight down the centre of the roof, looking like some bizarre Samurai weapon before striking the uniformed figure squarely in the base of its neck.

The creature snarled in its scratchy, unfinished voice. It dropped Patsy angrily and she slid to the edge of the roof, one leg slipping dangerously over the side. It spun around to face its assailant.

'Come on then!' Chris roared, his words lost as the whistle of the train was sounded. 'Come and get me!'

It ran towards him. Its long, powerful legs hitting the roof with such force that Chris felt the reverberation in his body. Patsy had dragged herself back on to the centre of the roof, for some reason she was looking away, in the direction the train was heading. Still, as long as he took the creature with him when he fell from the train she would be safe.

He couldn't take his eyes off the creature's head as it raced towards him. It was perfectly smooth, no blemishes at all. Just smooth blank skin. It reached for him.

Chris put up his fists.

'Get down,' Patsy screamed. 'Hit the deck.'

Distracted, he looked beyond the empty face that was almost upon him, to the mouth of the dark tunnel that had already swallowed half the train.

He threw himself on to his back, just as the creature reached him. For a second, he saw it lean over him, spear raised, snarling in triumph –

– and then the creature and sky disappeared, and there was only the roof of the tunnel – a dark blur, inches above his face. Just that and the deafening sound of the train echoing in the confined space.

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8

Against Nature

The doors were marked RESEARCH WING: NO ADMITTANCE in large unfriendly letters. The Doctor pushed through them without breaking his stride. A hospital orderly was trying to come through the swing doors from the other side and the Doctor knocked the door back into his face, sending them both sprawling to the ground.

They sat on the floor trying to get their bearings for a moment. The orderly –

a spotty young man with neat side-parting – took one look at the pyjamas the Doctor was wearing and exclaimed, 'Oi, you're not supposed to be in here.

How did you get past the no admittance sign?'

The Doctor made a show of looking bemused. 'I walked straight past it,' he quipped, as he scrambled to his feet.

'Hey, come back here,' the orderly shouted after the Doctor, who was already racing further into the restricted area. The Doctor had skidded around a corner before the orderly had even climbed to his feet.

Come on, Doctor, he told himself as he heard the young man start to give chase. You can't play hide and seek around the building all day. A plan is required. Something to keep you out of Moriah's clutches until you can find out more about him. Find out what makes him tick and then fiddle with the mechanism.

And I still have to rescue Jack.

One thing at a time, my dear Doctor, one thing at a time. The Doctor found a flight of stairs and ascended, taking the steps three at a time. He was no longer exactly sure where he was in relation to the ward and the mortuary. He was only certain that he was moving deeper into the heart of the building. The staircase opened out on to a quiet landing which smelt faintly of disinfectant.

A series of doors led off on either side of the corridor.

Someone started up the stairs behind him. The Doctor scurried from door to door with no success. The last door opened when he tried it, and without checking what lay behind it, the Doctor slipped inside.

Darkness. He heard footsteps in the corridor and the sound of locked doors rattling as they were tried. The Doctor held his breath and pressed his ear to the door, listening for any indication that the footsteps were approaching his 115

bolt-hole.

The footsteps came closer, until they sounded as if they were right outside, and then faded away. The Doctor let out the breath, silently.

Feeling the side of the wall until his fingers located a light switch, the Doctor squinted in the sudden brightness provided by a naked bulb. He blinked away the paisley spots in front of his eyes and then gasped out loud as he took in his surroundings.

The room he had secreted himself inside was waist-deep in bodies. The smooth, characterless bodies of the therapeutic mannequins. They were piled carelessly on top of one another. Arms and legs jutted out from the human mountain in such a way that it was almost impossible to distinguish which limbs belonged to which torso. Their skin was bruised and soft, like overripe fruit. Each of them had two neat surgical wounds on either side of their necks which were all too familiar to the Doctor. The atmosphere in the room was thick and sweet – almost nauseatingly so. It was the smell of flesh slowly putrefying.

Deactivation. The Doctor thought of the blond-haired boy whom he'd found in the alley in Soho. What was his name? Stone – that was it – Eddy Stone.

It seemed impossible that the boy who'd fought so hard to stay alive had only been a mannequin, animated only by Jack's love and need to be loved in return. What would Jack make of this? Best not to tell him, the Doctor thought. No point in hurting him further.

The room was long and thin. There was a door with an opaque glass panel set into it at the far end. The Doctor pulled his handkerchief out of his pocket and covered his nose and mouth with it, trying to hang on to his stomach.

Slowly, mindful of where he found his footing, he began to wade through the human swamp towards the door on the far side.

He was halfway across when something snagged his ankle in the depths of the bodies. The Doctor froze, trying to prevent his imagination from running wild. He waited for a moment and then tried to move on. Something pulled at his ankle again, only harder this time.

There was something alive at the bottom of the pile of bodies. A something that had wrapped itself around his foot. The Doctor fought an impulse to make a mad, desperate dash for the far side of the room. If he fell he might end up under the sea of corpses – it wasn't a prospect he relished.

Instead he bent over until his face was only a foot from the surface of the swamp and reached down through the entwined limbs until he found his own ankle. A cold hand was gripping it tightly.

A shiver ran up his spine.

The Doctor swallowed and began to prise off the icy fingers one by one.

He'd almost freed himself when a strangled hoarse cry emerged from some-116

where beneath him and the hand transferred its grip from his ankle to his wrist.

The Doctor yelped in surprise and fear and yanked his hand free. The surface of the sea of dead mannequins began to heave and fall, the corpses shifting like flotsam on a rough sea. Something was coming up after him.

Whether it was tiredness or just plain fear, the last remains of the Doctor's bravery left him; he turned and started to try to run out of the swamp. Inevitably, he lost his footing and fell face down against the bodies. They were soft, cool and dry against his face. He clawed at several of the moving bodies as he attempted to get back on to his feet. He only succeeded in tearing the skin of several of the Toys. Thick red blood seeped out of the saggy cadav-ers, adding a new chaotic pattern to the regular blue and white stripe of his pyjamas.

And then, behind him, a blank-faced mannequin erupted out of the surface of the swamp, howled in rage or perhaps in pain and then

leapt at him, using its long, sharp fingernails to scratch at his face. The Doctor tried to bat it away, but his blows only glanced off its thin, muscular grey body.

It thrust itself forward until it was leaning over him, and all he could see was its empty, oval head silhouetted by the naked bulb hanging from the ceiling.

The Doctor fought on, slapping the creature's head with the heel of his open hand. As he did so, his fingers caught in the creature's face and he retched bile as they sunk into the thick, tacky flesh. The air around the creature's face was filled with a rich aniseed flavour. Instinctively, he pulled his hand back, but his fingers were embedded, up to his knuckles, in the mannequin's soft face and as they came away they tore the creature's blank face from its head as if it were a mask.

It was a mask. And beneath it was the face of a young woman. Her eyes were wide and saucer-like. Her mouth opened to make a silent scream. Her face was blistered and inflamed by the flesh-mask. She made a few pitiful guttural sounds and then collapsed on top of the Doctor, all the fight suddenly gone out of her.

For a moment there was stillness, the silence only interrupted by the occasional rasping breath of the young woman. The Doctor stared at the pancake of flesh as he felt it shift and slide on his hand. The aniseed smell was stronger now – the Doctor was grateful for it as it hid the stench of the rotting bodies around him.

After a few minutes, the Doctor regained his footing and dragged the young woman to the far side of the room. Despite the scars and blisters left by the mask the Doctor could see that she was no more than seventeen. Her head had been roughly shaved at some point and now thin, dark stubble was growing back.

He pulled her into his arms, supporting her head with his hand. He was only vaguely aware that he was making soft reassuring noises to her in a language that didn't belong to this world. The Doctor could feel her growing weaker in his arms, he sensed the life drain out of her. There wasn't anything he could do and so he resolved to sit with her until. . .

Just until.

She was unlike the Toys the Doctor had seen in the ward and in the

hologram recording. They were clearly artificial creatures grown from Moriah's tissue and organ cultures. Grown from the bodies of the black cab's victims.

The young woman moaned and he stroked her head gently. Perhaps she was part of an earlier version of the Toys? When Moriah used whole human beings, fashioning them into his therapeutic instruments.

Whatever Moriah was doing here, it had nothing to do with healing. A person capable of so cruelly hurting and exploiting someone for their own ends couldn't possibly be committed to helping people in distress. The idea of inflicting this level of pain to help others was horribly absurd. No, whatever Moriah was about, whatever he was trying to achieve in this ghastly place, it wasn't psychotherapy – whatever Julia Mannheim thought.

Why were the search for scientific truth and moral blindness so often bed-fellows? The Doctor grimaced. He rather suspected that Julia Mannheim's scientific detachment was going to be rudely shattered.

A noise cut through his thoughts. It was the woman in his arms, her voice was a tiny breath – too faint for the Doctor to make out what she was trying to say. It was only when he curled over to try to listen more closely that he realized she had uttered her last words and had died.

The Doctor sat with his back against the wall for what felt like a long time, just cradling the dead girl in his arms, looking at the sea of corpses in front of him. And then he stood up, opened the door and left the room.

They found the Chinese boy curled up and sobbing in one of the carriage toilets where Patsy had hidden him. He was more alert than he had been on the journey up until now. Chris picked him up and hugged him tightly.

After the coldness of the roof, the little Chinese boy felt incredibly warm and smelt of sleep. His heart was like a tiny engine pounding in Chris's arms.

Something inside Chris melted, the hardness he needed to fight, and he stood for a moment, nuzzling the drowsy child in his arms. His ears were still ringing from the tunnel.

Patsy matter-of-factly examined the boy over Chris's shoulder, gently

opening one of his eyes with a finger. ‘The sedatives are wearing off. He’ll be all right.’

‘What’s his name?’ Chris said.

Patsy took the boy from him. ‘I don’t know,’ she said, flatly. ‘Does it matter?

Whatever the next person decides, I guess.’

They were interrupted by several passengers, led by the man in the bowler hat who Patsy had rudely dissuaded from sharing their compartment. They managed to look surprised when the bowler-hatted man reported that someone had been assaulted on the train and no one could find any of the staff.

Had they seen the ticket inspector?

Patsy and Chris exchanged glances and said that they hadn’t.

‘Come on,’ Patsy said, when they were alone once more. ‘We need to get off the train at the next station. The police are going to be crawling all over the place.’

Jack Bartlett was dreaming. Dreaming that he was on the bottom of a vast ocean. He was struggling to swim to the surface, but his legs were incredibly heavy and he kept being pulled back down to the seabed. Finally, he couldn’t hold his breath any longer – he relaxed his aching lungs and waited for them to flood with salt water. . .

‘Jack,’ a voice said close to his ear. Jack woke with a start and gasped for breath, feeling as if he really had just surfaced from deep in the ocean. He was lying on a cold bench. Marble. It slowly dawned on Jack that he was in a morgue. And he was lying on the slab.

‘Oh blimey!’ he exclaimed. ‘Am I dead?’

The Doctor was sitting next to him, his arm resting gently on Jack’s. He smiled, kindly. ‘Ssh. You’re not dead, very much alive in fact. But we’re in a lot of trouble, a lot of danger. Keep your voice down.’

Jack swung his legs off the bench and hopped down beside the Doctor. He realized too late that his feet were full of pins and needles and collapsed in a heap on the floor. ‘Oww!’

‘Ssh,’ the Doctor chided. He knelt down beside Jack and started to rub the life back into his numb legs. ‘I think it’s an effect of the anaesthetic. You’ll be all right.’

‘Why am I wearing pyjamas?’ Jack asked, noticing that the Doctor was similarly attired. He realized that he’d never seen the Doctor without his funny little hat. ‘What happened to our clothes?’

‘I’ve no idea. Were you particularly attached to them? If it’s really important I suppose I *could* go and look for them, but I’m a bit more concerned with getting us both out of here alive.’

‘I see.’ Jack thought about this. The events of the night before came rushing into his head like a tidal wave crashing on to a dusty beach. ‘Hey, what happened to that black cab? Blimey! I was inside of it. Where are we, Doctor?

What’s going on?’

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The Doctor finished his impromptu massage and fixed Jack with a weary look. ‘To take your questions in order: I don’t know; somewhere very dangerous; nothing good. What’s the last thing that you remember?’

Jack searched his memory. ‘Being sucked inside that horrible taxi and then. . . oh –’ he found himself suddenly blushing furiously ‘– you kissing me.’

The Doctor laughed. Jack thought that it was an easy laugh – not one out of awkwardness or embarrassment. ‘I had to blow the liquid from your lungs.

I put you into a trance to reduce your body’s requirement for oxygen to near zero. It’s a little trick I picked up from a Tibetan.’

Jack grinned. ‘I bet that’s what you say to all the boys.’ He wasn’t really sure that he understood what the Doctor was saying, but that probably only meant that things were getting back to normal, as only half of what the little man said ever made any kind of sense. ‘So you weren’t kissing me then?’

‘No,’ the Doctor said and climbed to his feet. ‘You’re about nine hundred and eighty years too young for me, Jack Bartlett,’ he added, as he headed for the door. ‘Not to mention an entirely different

species.'

Different species? Things were definitely getting back to normal. 'Good,'

Jack whispered to himself, as he followed the Doctor out of the room.

'Should we be doing this?' Jack asked as the Doctor picked the lock to Moriah's private quarters.

'I'll give you three guesses,' the Doctor replied, busy with a hairpin.

'Thought not.' The corridor was empty. There didn't seem to be anyone in this part of the hospital. The pyjamas he'd woken in were too big for him.

Jack folded back the long sleeves of the jacket and rolled the trouser bottoms into turn-ups. The linoleum floor was cold under his bare feet and he felt vulnerable without his shoes and socks on.

After a moment, the Doctor finished working on the lock and pushed the door gently. 'Ta-da!' he announced, as it swung silently open. He stepped to one side. 'After you,' he said.

Jack stepped over the threshold and into the room beyond. He let out a low whistle. Whoever lived here didn't want for much. It was a large room, bigger in fact than the whole ground floor of his mum's and dad's place back in Darlington. The walls were wood panelled and lined with tall bookshelves.

Thick rugs covered the floor and an open fire lit up the room with a warm orange glow. It reminded Jack of a gentleman's club like the ones he sometimes walked past on Pall Mall. He'd never actually been in a room like this before.

In fact, he'd only ever seen them at the pictures.

The thick carpet gently tickled his bare feet as he walked around the room.

One corner of the room opened out into a windowed turret, a large wooden 120

desk sat in the circular space, its chair positioned so the occupier could look up from his work and gaze out over the grounds of the building. Jack watched as the Doctor crossed to the desk and began to

root through the stacks of papers laid out upon it.

The Doctor flicked through great sheaves of papers so quickly that for a moment Jack thought he was just using them to fan himself. It was only when he joined the Doctor and saw his mouth moving slightly that Jack realized that the Doctor was actually *reading* each page that flashed past his eyes.

'You're from somewhere else, aren't you?' Jack began, giving voice to a suspicion that had been growing since the previous night. 'I mean really somewhere else, like Mars or Krypton or somewhere?'

The Doctor's mouth twitched slightly at this but he proceeded with his task, continuing to read at his roller-coaster pace. Jack cast his eyes down at the papers on the desk. The paper looked old and stiff, like parchment. Someone had etched delicate symbols on the sheets. Animals, mostly. Some snakes, furry horses and something that looked like a lizard that stood on its hind legs, like a person. One of the symbols caught Jack's eye. It was a bird of paradise framed by a circle. The bird in the circle was elegant and exotic, and was clearly preparing for flight. He'd seen that image before, carved on to the surface of the glass sphere in Gordy Scraton's nightclub.

'Is this Egyptian writing, Doctor, you know, hierographics?'

'Glyphs, Jack. Hieroglyphs.' He shook his head, irritably. 'Ancient Egyptian isn't the only language with a pictorial alphabet in the Galaxy, you know. And this one certainly didn't originate on this planet.' The Doctor dropped the papers he'd been reading on to the desk with a satisfying thump. 'Don't they teach you anything useful in your schools?'

'I think I left before they got around to teaching us Martian.' Jack looked at the Doctor. 'You're not pulling my leg, are you? This writing is from Venus or somewhere, isn't it?'

'Rather further than Venus, I suspect. But no, I'm not pulling your leg, Jack.'

'And you weren't having me on when you said that you were a different species either? You're from outer space too, aren't you?'

The Doctor smiled at some private joke. 'Yes,' he said, after a moment, 'in a manner of speaking. Although I'm not really from anywhere anymore. I travel in time and space.'

Jack looked at the little man afresh. He took in his mischievous eyes, his wild, sweaty brown hair and his blood-splattered pyjamas. He didn't look like a man from outer space. He looked more like Christie on a bad day.

Jack wanted to take advantage of the Doctor's sudden and rare willingness to answer questions. 'And the bloke behind this place – Moriah? – is he the same as you?'

‘Well I hope not, Jack,’ the Doctor muttered. ‘I do hope not.’ He tilted his head and his brow furrowed. ‘I only glimpsed him, but he does seem familiar somehow. I’m fairly sure I don’t recognize him personally, but I think I’ve encountered others of his race before. It’s just a question of when and where.’

‘Doesn’t it say where he’s from in those papers?’

‘I’m afraid not, Jack. These only seem to be the plans for a time corridor.’

‘Come again?’

‘A gateway linking one time and place in the Universe with another. A secret passage in the structure of the Galaxy. The Universe’s equivalent of a back staircase. Presumably that’s how Moriah found his way to Earth.’

‘Oh,’ Jack said, feeling rather out of his depth. He tried to imagine what a corridor in time and space might look like, and failed. Weren’t spacemen supposed to travel to Earth in silver flying saucers?

The Doctor must have caught sight of the expression on his face, because he smiled and said, ‘Why not have a look around? See if you can find any clues.’

Jack nodded and wandered a little aimlessly around the room. He had no idea what a ‘clue’ might look like, and suspected that the Doctor wasn’t really expecting him to find anything, only trying to get him out of his hair for a few minutes.

The room was decorated with strange and unsettling objects. A stuffed eagle sat in a tall glass jar, the skulls of small rodents decorated the mantelpiece, and a line of small bottles filled with opaque liquid had been placed precariously along one of the bookcases. Jack pulled the tiny cork out of one of them and, gingerly, took a sniff. It smelt faintly of aniseed. Peering inside, he thought he saw the liquid begin to climb up the side of the glass towards him.

Reminded of the black cab, Jack hastily pressed the stopper back on the bottle and replaced it on the shelf.

A large portrait of a woman hung on the far wall. Something about the painting bothered Jack. It took him a moment to work out what it was. Whoever had hung the painting had placed it too low down on

the wall. The bottom of the large picture frame was only a few inches above the ground, and yet there was a much larger gap between the top of the painting and the ceiling. Jack moved forward to examine the painting more closely, it was almost as if the painting was covering a –

'Blimey,' he whispered, as he moved closer and saw the face of the woman in the picture. That face was unmistakable. The woman was dressed in elegant, ornamental robes, and wore a strange headdress which concealed her hair.

She was sitting in a room which was decorated in similar symbols to those inscribed on the papers the Doctor had found on the desk. However, it was the woman's face which had caught Jack's attention so completely.

'Doctor,' he managed, but his voice was a hoarse whisper. He cleared his throat and tried again. 'Doctor, I think you'd better have a look at this.'

'What's that, Jack?' the Doctor asked, absently, from the other side of the room.

'I think you'd better come and see this for yourself.'

The Doctor glanced up from the desk, looking puzzled. Still holding several sheaves of paper he joined Jack in front of the painting. 'Very striking,' he turned to Jack, expectantly. 'Well?'

'Look at her face.'

The Doctor turned back to the painting. His eyes widened, suddenly. 'My goodness! I've seen that woman somewhere before. How frustrating. It's on the tip of my mind.'

A small plaque was attached to the bottom of the frame. Jack squinted at the tiny writing. 'According to this her name is Petruska, First Queen of. . .

somewhere foreign, I think.'

'But she looks like. . . like –' the Doctor said, still struggling to remember.

‘Mother. At least that’s what everyone that I know calls her. She’s a friend of Eddy’s. I mean she was. . . She runs a club in Soho,’ he said.

The Doctor clapped his hands together excitedly. ‘That’s right! That’s absolutely right. If I didn’t know better I would say that it was a picture of Tilda Jupp. What on Earth is she doing here, I wonder?’

‘Perhaps it’s just a coincidence?’ Jack said, and then stared at the Doctor. ‘I didn’t know you knew Mother.’

‘It’s a small Universe. We met in a restaurant the night before last. Gosh, that does seem like a long time ago. Do you know, I think there’s something very odd about this picture.’ The Doctor leant forward to examine the painting, his attention completely focused on the image of the woman.

Jack felt pleased to have the answer. ‘I noticed that too. It’s hung far too low down the wall. It’s not where you would expect a painting to be at all. It reminded me of a door.’

The Doctor didn’t appear to have heard him. He’d stepped a few feet back from the painting and squinted. Jack thought he looked like an art critic at a gallery opening.

‘It’s certainly not been hung to its best advantage,’ he said, looking studious.

Jack nodded, impatiently. ‘Perhaps there’s some kind of special catch to open it.’

The Doctor still wasn’t listening. He raised his hands in front of him, framing the painting with his fingers. ‘It’s been hung too low down the wall. It reminds me of something –’

Jack exhaled loudly, trying to attract the Doctor’s attention. Failing, he ran his fingers along the edge of the picture frame. He felt something give beneath 123

his fingers. The painting began to swing away from the wall on a hinge. A chink of emerald light escaped from behind the painting and bled into the room. It was the same icy light that had shone from the lamp on the taxi. Was this where the monstrous vehicle came from? Did this lead to its lair?

‘I knew it!’ The Doctor exclaimed, looking at the passageway which was revealed behind the picture – an expression of complete surprise

on his face.

‘It’s a secret door.’

They had been descending steadily for almost five minutes. Surely they must be far below the ground floor by now? Jack wondered, a little fearfully, where the stairs might lead. A cellar, or perhaps, if they were lucky, a secret exit from the building? The atmosphere was thick and damp, and Jack was privately worried that they might run out of air as they travelled ever further down.

The stairs turned into a passageway which twisted and sloped wildly several times before opening out on to a small platform which looked out over a large underground cavern. From their high vantage point, Jack could see a ring of burning emerald lights below them on the floor of the cave. From this distance they looked like a discarded necklace of luminous pearls. A figure was seated, cross-legged and Buddha-like, in the middle of the globes.

Whoever the person was, he was too far away for Jack to identify.

‘It’s Moriah,’ the Doctor whispered.

‘Blimey, how can you tell?’ Jack said.

The Doctor didn’t seem to understand what he meant. ‘Well, I have seen him before.’

Jack smiled ruefully. The figure may have been too far for a mere mortal like Jack to make out, but that didn’t seem to stop the Doctor. Was there nothing that the little man couldn’t do?

‘Let’s get closer,’ the Doctor said, and started to climb down a stone staircase which was carved into the wall of the cavern, leading from the platform down to the floor below. He moved silently in the dusty rubble.

The stairs were old and felt like they might crumble when Jack put his weight on them. He swallowed hard and followed, trying to stop himself from looking down.

The cavern floor was rough and lined with deep, jagged cracks. The light from the circle of globes played over the rock walls, turning them varying shades of a deep brackish green. The eerie illuminance made the cavern appear as if it were deep underwater. It was like standing on the bottom of a stagnant lagoon. The air was thick, sweet

and medicinal. The same cloying smell that had enveloped him in the black cab. Scattered across the floor of the cavern were pools of the dark liquid. Jack hadn't noticed them at first, had 124

thought them shadows in the gloom. The surface of pools trembled slightly, almost in. . . anticipation.

The Doctor led Jack over a cluster of stalagmites close to the ring of emerald fire. Jack wanted to look, but when he lifted his head over the rocks, the Doctor pushed it back down. There were voices coming from the circle of spheres. One was a deep unearthly whisper: Moriah? The other voice sounded thin and tinny, as if it were coming from far away. Jack thought he recognized the second voice, male and younger than the first. It sounded anxious and eager to please. The man spoke with a London accent – Jack was sure he recognized the speaker. The voice made him feel uncomfortable.

Well, the only way to be sure was to see. Before the Doctor could stop him, Jack quickly stuck his head over the top of the rocks and stole a glimpse at the centre of the fiery circle. A large, heavy-set man sat in the centre of the ring of globes. His face was large, with strong, hard features, which looked as if they had been cut out of granite. He had short, steel-grey hair, although his face was curiously smooth and ageless. Only his eyes, which were small and dark, looked old and impossibly weary. As if he hadn't slept for days or. . . years.

'Moriah,' the Doctor whispered, as he popped up beside Jack.

The hoarse whisper belonged to the large, grey-haired man. At first Jack assumed that Moriah was talking to himself, but after a moment he realized that this wasn't the case at all. Moriah was addressing the globes themselves.

In each of the large crystal balls there burnt an image of a man's face that Jack knew all too well. It was the young, crew-cut man from the nightclub in Soho.

Gordy Scraton, the boss of the gang that had blackmailed him and made the last few months of his life a living hell.

'I will get the boy, Lord,' the thug promised. 'You'll just have to be a little patient.'

The Doctor and Jack exchanged puzzled glances. *Lord?* they mouthed in unison.

In the centre of the circle, Moriah exhaled quickly and loudly, like a bull snorting before it charged. 'I've *been* patient, Mr Scraton,' he hissed. 'I expect total obedience from those who dare to serve me. The. . . boy must be destroyed,' he said, the tension evident in his voice. 'And quickly. There are others whom you must kill. Many others.'

Gordy's image in the globes looked impatient, almost angry. 'If you'd just see your way to providing some more money then I could put a few more lads on the payroll. Then I could take out whoever you wanted. No problem.'

Gordy paused and then looked small and a little pathetic. 'Please give us some cash. I've had to deal with some local difficulties and I've lost one of my regular sources of income.'

Moriah considered this for a moment. 'You'll have no more money from 125

me until you've proved I have your complete loyalty, that you will serve me faithfully.'

Gordy looked set to interrupt him, but Moriah continued. 'However, I've a few. . . lost souls who might be persuaded to work for you.'

'Lost souls?' Gordy questioned, fearfully.

'Men, Gordon,' Moriah laughed dryly. 'Men who'll carry out your orders.

Think of the kind of men you need for your little gang and you'll find them waiting for you in the morning.'

The Doctor pulled Jack back down behind their cover. 'We need to get back to Soho, quickly. I've a nasty suspicion that the boy they mean to kill is your roommate's little brother.'

'What!' Jack started, and the Doctor quickly leant over to cover his mouth.

'Ssh,' the Doctor whispered. 'I'm only guessing.'

'How do you know that it's Dennis they want to hurt?'

'Because he and Eddy are of the same –' the Doctor stopped himself, an uncomfortable expression crossing his face.

Jack felt a chill creep down his spine. Suddenly the Doctor didn't seem able to meet his gaze. What did the Doctor know?

'This isn't the time to explain,' the Doctor snapped, trying to keep his voice low. 'We need to see if we can't find a way to get you back to London. Moriah will be shipping out some men for our friend, Gordy. If we're lucky we can get you stowed away with them.'

'What are you going to do?' Jack asked.

The Doctor winked at him, and forced a smile – which only served to further Jack's feeling of unease. 'Don't worry about me,' he said. 'I'm going to try a little subterfuge.'

9

Sweet And Tender Hooligan

Gordy Scraton slept badly that night. What kind of men might the devil send him? Zombies? Demons? Goblins? What had the disembodied voice called them? Lost souls. His dreams had been full of cold and pale human-shaped figures who lumbered through the dark behind him, reaching for him with long, broken fingers.

Gordy had woken, twisted up in his black silk sheets and chilled by a cold sweat. Despite being terrified as to what he might find lurking in his secret shrine that morning, he still threw himself into yesterday's clothes and, without bothering to pause to wash, he made his way down to the basement. What would the devil have brought him?

Gordy felt their presence when he entered the shrine. There were half a dozen figures standing quietly in the shadows. At first he couldn't quite see their faces, but as he looked harder he recognized some of the hardest men in London's underworld. They were all there: Jake Dimes, Ronnie Donaghue, Billy Spot.

Blue-eyed Billy Spot! The short man stepped out of the shadows, took a last drag on his roll-up and ground it out beneath his heel. Billy Spot was a charismatic and attractive young man, probably in his late twenties. He was short and stocky. The way he moved suggested that he was comfortable with himself, untroubled and at ease. He was an East End lad growing gracefully into an East End man. Gordy had heard that Billy Spot had worked as a barrow boy for his old man, until he'd decided that robbing banks was a more lucrative way of

earning a living than selling fruit and veg. Gordy could easily imagine Billy working on a market in the East End, sharing a joke and a natter with regular customers. It was hard to imagine him acting violently or committing a crime.

But Gordy knew that this was a man who'd ripped off three banks in as many years, who was rumoured to have killed four men and half as many women. This man was a hero. Gordy envied his city-wide reputation.

Gordy could have cried out with joy, when the armed robber nodded respectfully to him. The devil had certainly come up with the goods this time.

Gordy didn't care what kind of magic the devil had cast to make it come true.

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With men of this calibre and reputation in his employ, Gordy could really make his mark in Soho.

He'd show those bastards who'd told him that he wasn't up to running the Scraton gang. The accusations had started soon after his brother's funeral.

Albert's men had said that he was weak, that he was a coward, that he wasn't up to the job. Well, they'd be singing a different tune now. They'd soon come crawling back wanting to be in on his rackets when they heard that he had the likes of Billy Spot working for him. He could take Soho in a matter of days.

No, once the word got out, he would be running the whole town in a matter of *hours*.

Gordy tried to conceal his excitement; it wouldn't do to let on to his new army that he was impressed with them.

'I hear you got a little job for me?' Spot said, matter-of-factly.

Gordy felt himself nodding quickly, stupidly, and he tried to get a grip on himself. He swallowed and forced himself to take slow, deep breaths.

'That's right,' he managed, after a few seconds. 'I want you to see to a couple of people, put them out of action, you know, permanently.'

Spot nodded. ‘Who do you want killed?’ he said, as if he were asking what type of beer Gordy fancied. Gordy was shocked and more than a little intimidated by this casual attitude to murder.

‘No one important. Just a kid and a couple of queers,’ Gordy said quickly.

Too quickly. ‘I’d get Carl, my brother, to do it, only he can get a bit carried away, a bit too excited. You know what I mean?’

Billy Spot nodded, knowingly. ‘You mean he takes pleasure in his work, that’s the sign of a real craftsman, that is. You got an address?’

Carl Scraton was a simple creature. His entire world revolved around his brother, Gordy. There was simply no one else in his life. No mates, no women, no one. Beyond his brother, the only other meaningful, long-term relationship he maintained was with the cut-throat razor he kept in his jacket pocket.

He put the Rover into gear and drove the large black car out of Soho, heading West. Unconsciously, he slipped his hand to the razor in his pocket and fingered it nervously. He stole a quick glance at the armed robber sitting in the passenger seat of the car. Since this morning, his life had suddenly become more complicated.

Carl had experienced a new emotion as he had watched his brother chatting and joking with Billy Spot. It was a bitter feeling that made him feel a little sick in his stomach.

He was jealous. He’d never felt it before. Never had a reason to. Not until Billy Spot had entered their lives that morning, capturing his brother’s attention in moments.

Carl’s hand went to his cheek, he ran his finger along the scar that had formed over the wound there.

Billy Spot started to whistle jauntily.

Mikey was making Dennis’s breakfast when the window to their lodgings opened from the outside and his roommate tumbled in from the fire escape.

For some reason, Jack was wearing a pair of filthy pyjamas.

‘Hello, Mikey,’ Jack said, cheerfully, and swiped the slice of toast that Mikey had just buttered for little Dennis.

‘Hey!’ Mikey tried to grab the toast back, but Jack was too quick for him.

‘Where have you been? The police have been here and everything.’

‘The police?’

‘Inspector Harris. Wanted to know if I ’ad seen you or your new friend. That little man.’

‘Oh right,’ Jack said, and handed Dennis the remains of the piece of toast, before rooting through his wardrobe for some clothes.

‘Thanks Uncle Jack,’ Dennis grinned.

‘He’s not your uncle,’ Mikey snapped, ritually. ‘Don’t call him that.’

Mikey was confused. This casual confidence wasn’t like Jack at all. They’d shared the room for almost a year now and he felt that he knew Jack pretty well. Just mentioning the police usually made him nervous. Something about Jack’s cheerfulness bothered Mikey. Jack’s bare feet were filthy and covered in tiny cuts. He looked like someone who had just walked away from an accident and was trying to convince everyone that they were fine. ‘Jack, what’s going on?’

Jack pulled a sweater over his pyjamas. ‘You wouldn’t believe it, not in a month of Sundays. *I* don’t believe it and I was there.’

‘Where? What are you talking about?’

‘I’m really not sure. I haven’t slept, not properly, not since the day before yesterday. Look, Mikey, you need to pack, just some clothes for you and Dennis. I’ll explain everything later.’

‘Are we going on our holidays?’ Dennis asked, excitedly, his mouth full of buttery toast.

Mikey glanced at his little brother and shook his head. ‘No, we are not. Eat your breakfast,’ he scolded and turned back to Jack. ‘You don’t make no sense.

I’ve got to get to work. It’s the first chance I’ve had to do some overtime this month.’

Jack slipped a pair of his paint-streaked work trousers over his pyjama bottoms. ‘Forget overtime. It’s not important.’

Mikey raised his eyebrows at this. Now he knew that there was something wrong. Jack was always trying to get more overtime at the building site, 129

although Mikey never knew why as he never seemed to spend any money.

‘Jack, you know I need the extra work so’s I can feed me boy. Hey, ain’t you gonna wash, you filthy git?’

‘No time. Look, Dennis is in danger. We’re all in danger. The Doctor’s given me the address of a house in Kent we can stay at. How much money have you got?’

‘I ’aint got no money, that’s why I need the work. Why are you saying that Dennis is in trouble? Is this some kind of sick joke?’

Jack sat down on his bed, suddenly. ‘It’s no joke, Mikey,’ he said, his voice solemn. ‘Eddy’s dead. Killed. The Doctor found him near the paper stand.

The Scratons killed Eddy and now they’re after Dennis.’

The Scratons! What the hell had Jack got himself involved in?

For a moment there was a shocked silence and then Mikey and Jack both jumped at the sound of a chair being knocked over backwards. Dennis leapt up and ran around the table, wrapping himself tightly around Mikey’s waist.

The houses in Notting Hill were grey, battered and dusty. There were few cars on the roads – those that there were moved quickly, as if their drivers were eager to hurry through the area and get to the comparative safety of Bayswater.

A canal ran parallel to the road, the Grand Union. Carl whispered the name to himself. He hated to be away from his brother and the familiar streets of Soho. Carl found it reassuring to be able to name some of the sights outside the car in this strange and desolate part of the city, as if he were marking a trail home. There weren’t any boats in sight on the Grand Union Canal – Carl would have liked to have seen some boats – but he knew that nothing floated on the Grand Union, nothing except for dead cats and used contraceptives.

Carl sneered at the people who weaved their way through the rubbish and wrecked furniture which littered the pavements and gutter. Ageing Teds with their ridiculous hair and old-fashioned clothes were clumped in small groups in front of houses, their conversation full of empty boasts and alcohol. Worn out old people as grey as their clothes dragged wheeled shopping bags behind them, going nowhere. Out-of-business prostitutes chatted the day away, having lost their customers to younger girls.

Carl Scraton hated them all. They were filthy broken people. They didn't deserve to live in the same city as respectable, decent white folk. Especially not the blacks. And they were everywhere in Notting Hill.

Thinking of them reminded Carl of his task. They were near the place where the paperboy lived: Carl had carefully memorized the road names before he left the club. Just thinking about the paperboy made Carl tense up. He'd had him in his hands the other night and he'd let him get away. He should have 130

finished him, stuck his knife in him. But he'd failed. Failed to do the job.

Failed his brother. If he'd done the job properly, then there wouldn't be any need to drive out here with Billy Spot. Maybe there wouldn't have been any need for Billy Spot to be here at all. Everything might be the same as it usually was.

The man in the passenger seat continued to whistle. The sound was really getting on Carl's nerves. He started to imagine what it would be like to hurt Billy Spot. To make him cry out in pain. To wipe the smile from that broad, attractive face; knock a few teeth out of that laddish smile. Carl gripped the steering wheel tightly and drove on.

'Tell me,' Billy Spot said, out of nowhere, in his bright cockney accent, 'don't you think it's a little strange that your man Gordy wants a little boy killed?'

That was it! Carl hit the brakes. The car skidded to a halt, the back swinging around until the Rover was at a right angle to the road, blocking both lanes of the quiet street.

Without needing to think about it, his razor was between his fingers, and its blade up against Billy Spot's throat.

'You don't question my brother's orders, all right?' He scraped the

edge of the razor against Spot's Adam's apple. 'You understand?'

Billy Spot raised his hands in a gesture of submission. 'Whatever you say.'

He tried to smile, but Carl could see that beneath the smile the armed robber was scared. That made Carl feel good. He started to relax and let out a giggle.

He left the cut-throat resting lightly on the armed robber's throat for a long moment, fighting the urge to open an artery.

Behind them, someone sounded their horn.

Reluctantly, Carl tucked the knife away in his jacket pocket. 'This is my job.

I'm gonna do the boy. He's mine.'

'You're the boss,' Billy Spot said, sounding anxious.

'I'm the boss,' Carl repeated. 'That's right. Just as long as we understand each other.'

'Perfectly,' Billy Spot replied, and wiped his forehead with a brightly patterned handkerchief. 'Perfectly.'

Mikey took one look back at the room, before he climbed out of the window and then reached back in and lifted Dennis out. He wondered if he would ever see the place again. The room was small and damp and sharing it between four of them hadn't been easy, particularly when he'd finally worked out why Jack and Eddy didn't sleep top to tail like he and little Dennis always did.

Yeah. That *had* been quite a surprise.

It had taken a long time to find a landlady who would have a Jamaican as a tenant, and Mikey didn't relish having to go trudging through the streets hunt-131

ing for accommodation again. Particularly not now that he had his brother to think of as well. At first he'd been shocked when he realized why he had found it so hard to find a room, when most of the English lads on the site hadn't had any trouble at all. It was only later that he had felt angry.

Jack climbed out of the window after them, his duffel bag slung over

his shoulder.

‘Ready?’ Jack asked, and Mikey nodded.

They made their way down to the street, careful to duck under the front window of Mrs Carroway’s sitting room. Neither of them were up to date with the rent and Jack’s was months behind. They paused a little way down the street so Mikey could tie Dennis’s shoelaces.

Mikey was pulling the last bow tight when he heard Jack curse. He stood up in time to see a large, expensive-looking car heading down the road towards them. The saloon car was completely out of place in their street.

He turned to Jack, who was staring at the car. ‘What? Is that them?’

‘I dunno. It could be the law, I suppose?’

As the car drew close, it suddenly accelerated towards them.

Mikey

glimpsed two young white men in the front seats, glaring intently at them.

Mikey had seen that look before.

‘That’s not the law. Come on, Jack, we gotta get out of here! Run!’ Discard-ing his bags, Mikey took one of Dennis’s hands, Jack took the other and they set off down the street pulling the boy along between them.

‘Whee!’ Dennis yelled, oblivious to the danger, kicking the air as his feet left the ground.

Fear gripped Mikey and he found it hard to take proper breaths as he ran.

How were they going to get Dennis away from the Scratons? If the little boy had seen them kill Jack’s friend, then they wouldn’t stop until they had got him. There was no way they were going to be able to get away on foot. He could hear the throaty sound of the car’s engine as it came alongside them, effortlessly matching their desperate pace.

Please don’t let them have guns! Mikey prayed, but he didn’t dare look across to see.

As they reached the end of Silchester Road, the car mounted the pavement, the wheels hitting the kerb with a thump. It crashed into the front wall of one of the derelict Victorian town houses on the other side of the pavement, cutting off their escape.

Mikey and Jack skidded to a halt and started back down the street, still clutching little Dennis between them.

The driver's door opened first, a

scrawny looking young man with fiery red hair and a scar running down his cheek, leapt out of the car and raced towards them.

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Mikey heard Jack gasp in terror. He must have recognized the man. The scar-faced man was staring directly at Mikey, his angular, mean face twisted with hatred, and beyond that fear.

'You're dead!' the man spat. 'Do you hear me? Dead.'

Mikey must have frozen, because the next thing he remembered was Dennis tugging at his arm. 'We gotta go, Mikey. Go now.'

The scar-faced man pulled something from his jacket. It was a knife. Only then did Mikey find the ability to turn and run.

And by then it was far too late.

'Bloody amateur!' Billy Spot yelled after Carl, trying to attract his attention and failing. Spot jumped out of the car and gave chase. What was Carl Scraton going to do? Kill the boy in the middle of the street?

Carl leapt at the older black's retreating back. He got a grip on the collar of his cheap suit and pulled him down roughly on to the ground, where he sprawled across the pavement.

The boy he had come to kill was too far away for Carl to reach and would have probably got away if he'd kept running, but for some reason the little boy turned and ran back. Carl couldn't believe his luck. The little boy was actually trying to stage a rescue attempt! The futility of the gesture made Carl laugh out loud. His mirth only enraged the boy, who screamed as he kicked at Carl and tried to push him off his brother.

The queer who'd broken into the club the other night had hesitated at

first, as if he didn't know what to do, but now he was heading back, following the little boy's example. How stupid could you get? Carl thought to himself. What did the dirty little bleeder think he was gonna do?

The older black had hit the pavement hard and wasn't going anywhere. Carl landed a satisfying punch to his stomach just to be certain, and then reached out and grabbed hold of the boy he'd come for, lifting him clean off his feet.

Yes!

The boy wriggled in his grasp, kicking out desperately. Carl barely felt the blows against his shins. He spun the boy around and trapped his small, fragile neck under his arm. He could probably break the boy's neck just by squeezing hard, just by pulling his own arm tightly into his body.

Carl had to admit he was tempted. But that wasn't the right way to do the job. This job had to be done a special way, just like Gordy had taught him, and Carl wasn't about to disappoint his brother by messing it up. He wasn't going to disappoint his brother again.

The kid must have caught sight of the razor, because he started to whimper and struggle harder. Carl carefully brought the blade down to the base of the 133

boy's throat.

Oh yes.

'What the frigging hell do you think you're doing?' A man's voice shouted near him. 'You stick him here and you'll have every black in the street down on us. Not to mention the law.'

Carl flinched at the angry tones. He turned to see Billy Spot bearing down on him. 'Get him in the car before you bring the whole street down on us.'

'Keep back,' Carl screamed. He wasn't going to let Spot take his glory now.

'Keep back or I'll do it right here, right now, I swear.'

The boy started to cry loudly in his arms. Carl glanced about him, feeling like a trapped animal. The queer boy was close by, helping the

fallen black to his feet. A few Teds on the other side of the street were beginning to take an interest, having heard the noise of the crash. Perhaps it would be best just to kill the little boy now and then make a run for it?

Billy Spot raised his hands and moved closer. ‘Come on, Carl,’ he said, softly. ‘We don’t want no trouble in the street. Gordy wouldn’t be pleased if you brought the law down on him, now would he?’

‘You leave my brother out of this,’ Carl yelled and clutched the boy tighter.

He was suddenly less sure of himself. It was hard to be sure of anything while the armed robber’s eyes were on him.

Billy Spot made a show of looking around them. ‘We’re attracting attention.

You don’t want the police to get a description, do you? Tell you what, you keep hold of the lad, good and proper, and I’ll drive us back.’ He nodded towards the queer and the black, who were looking on, their eyes fixed on the blade in his hand as if willing him not to use it. ‘They’re not going to give us any trouble now, are they? Not while you’ve got the boy. We can take them back with us. An extra prize for Gordy.’

There was a soothing quality to Billy Spot’s voice and Carl found himself nodding along with the cockney’s words.

‘That’s right. I’ve got the boy,’ Carl murmured, transfixed by Billy Spot’s deep blue eyes. ‘I’ll get the prize.’

Jack sat in the back of the car next to the scar-faced man who held the razor to little Dennis’s throat. Dennis appeared to have retreated into himself, his brown eyes stared sightlessly in front of him, and his teeth were chattering. A trail of snot hung from his nose. Jack started to reach for his handkerchief to wipe it for him, like he often did at home, and then he took one look at Carl Scraton and changed his mind.

Little Dennis was making tiny noises. Whispered words repeated over and over like a ritual prayer.

Carl Scraton looked almost as hysterical as Dennis, his knuckles white

where his hand gripped the handle of the razor. Hysterical and dangerous.

How could anyone even think of killing a child?

'What are you looking at?' Carl spat. Jack flinched and turned away, scared that he might inadvertently do something that might provoke the thug into using his knife. Jack caught the second man's eye in the driver's mirror for a moment. There was something familiar about the driver, although Jack was sure that he hadn't actually seen his face before.

The driver winked at Jack.

The thunder of footsteps sounded in the office upstairs. Gordy glanced towards the stairs which led up out of the cellar. If that was Carl and Billy returning then they must have done the job. Here was a chance to really impress his devil.

Daylight streaked into the underground room from the top of the stairs, dissolving the eerie gloom and causing Gordy to blink repeatedly.

Carl descended the stairs holding the boy in an arm-lock. The boy's body was limp, his short, thin legs swinging loosely, reminding Gordy of a ven-triloquist's dummy. Billy Spot pushed two figures down the stairs in front of him, their hands tied behind their backs. One was a black – probably Dennis's brother. He wasn't important. The other was –

A smile spread across his face. 'Hello, Jack Bartlett,' Gordy beamed, suddenly feeling powerful and in charge. 'I've been looking forward to seeing you again. Tell me, where's your friend?'

The stupid little queer tried to play dumb. Christ, it was so obvious that Gordy could have laughed out loud. He sauntered over to Jack and then smacked him around the face. Jack gasped, unable to keep his balance with his wrists bound, and fell to the ground.

Gordy stood over the lad, rubbing his stinging knuckles. The pain felt good –

sharp and clear. He'd been looking forward to this. 'That's for thinking that you could get away from me without paying your dues.'

He kicked Jack in the small of his back just as the lad was trying to

clamber to his feet. ‘And *that* is for burning the contents of my safe.’

With his hands tied behind his back, Jack was unable to protect his face.

He tried to curl up into a ball, a feeble gesture of self-protection. ‘Please,’ he muttered, ‘don’t hit me.’

Gordy smiled. It was as if Jack was inviting him to do it again. He moved forward preparing himself to land another kick when Billy Spot stepped between them.

‘Gordy, my old mate,’ he said brightly. ‘We got the boy, just like you asked.’

Gordy stepped back, putting some space between himself and Billy Spot.

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‘Yeah? So?’ He frowned. Why was Spot interrupting him? Hadn’t he seen that Gordy had been about to really hurt the lad? Was he trying to stop him?

Billy Spot was looking expectantly at him. And then it dawned on Gordy that Billy Spot was waiting for Gordy to tell him that he’d done his job well, waiting to be praised.

A memory of his older brother Albert popped into Gordy’s head. Keep the troops sweet, Albert always used to say. Make them feel important and essential. Make them feel part of something. Make them feel like family.

Gordy planted a hand on Billy Spot’s shoulder and told him that he was pleased with what he’d done. The words didn’t come easily. Gordy found it hard to act like a leader when they were both roughly the same age. But he must have done all right because the East Ender started to smile a little.

Gordy felt that he was beginning to understand what it meant to be the boss of a firm. What it meant to be in charge. Albert would’ve been proud of him.

‘Yeah, you done good getting the boy here, and. . . everything,’ Gordy concluded. ‘Now we just need to finish him off.’

Gordy was surprised when, after everything he'd just said, Billy Spot asked him why the boy had to be killed.

'What do you mean?' Gordy said, starting to feel annoyed. He wanted to have some more fun hurting Jack Bartlett and having this conversation was getting in the way. Praising the new employee was one thing, justifying his actions to him was quite another. 'Because I'm telling you that he has to, that's why.'

Billy Spot didn't look like he was going to let the matter drop, but he was interrupted by a new voice.

'And because *I* told Mr Scraton to.' Deep emerald light filled the room as the large glass sphere which sat on the small altar at the back of the room came to life, an intense spark burning at its core.

'I want the child destroyed immediately.' The devil's voice was an intense whisper. 'Bring it over here. Let me hear its death cries.'

Gordy felt annoyed that the devil had implied that all he did was follow its orders. He nodded to Carl who was looking expectantly at him, and his brother carried Dennis over to the sphere ready to do the job.

Gordy turned back to Billy Spot. 'You see, you're not dealing with just anyone here, Mr Spot,' he said, addressing the thug in the same manner as the devil had addressed him. 'Me and my brother have got the luck of the devil himself on our side.'

'Enough of this, Scraton,' the devil said, its voice harsh. 'Just destroy it.'

Carl moved his knife to the boy's throat.

'Wait!' Gordy said, angry and upset to be publicly admonished by the devil.

'I want Billy Spot to do it.'

'No!' Carl cried. 'He's mine. I was promised.'

'Shut up, Carl,' Gordy snapped. He could deal with his brother later. 'It's time for Billy to prove his loyalty to the firm. Are you ready to work for me and my devil?'

Billy Spot appeared to consider this for a moment and then nodded. Gordy watched him lift the unconscious boy out of Carl's reluctant arms. Gordy had to physically intervene to persuade Carl to give up his razor.

'Once you've done this, then you can be one of us,' Gordy encouraged, willing Billy Spot on. 'Then you'll be in the gang.'

For a long moment, Billy Spot stood next to Carl, with the limp body of the boy tucked under one arm and the cut-throat razor in the other.

But Billy Spot didn't use the knife. Instead, without once taking his eyes off Gordy, he closed the razor neatly and quickly stretched out with one hand and pressed his index finger to Carl's forehead. There was a faint buzzing sound and Carl toppled backwards on to the ground and was still.

'Enough of this,' Billy Spot said, without a trace of a London accent.

Gordy's mouth fell open, but he couldn't find any words at all.

And then Billy Spot removed his face. He grabbed hold of the skin under his chin and pulled his hand up across his face, tearing a huge pancake of flesh from the front of his head.

In an instant Billy Spot was gone and, revealed beneath was a face Gordy had little trouble recognizing. Its features were pink and raw, and covered in tiny blisters, but the face was unmistakable.

It was the little Scotsman, the one who called himself the Doctor.

'Surprise,' he said.

Gordy didn't move. Couldn't move. He just stood and stared at the man in front of him as his conscious mind tried to ask a thousand questions at once and failed.

'It's not possible. Not possible,' he managed, and began to back away slowly from the red and grinning face.

How could Billy Spot be the Doctor? How could you hide yourself away in another person's body? Gordy had talked to Billy Spot that morning when the man had come to work for him, just as the devil said he would. Had the devil sent the Doctor? No, that was impossible, the devil was on Gordy's side. The devil was his friend. So how had the Doctor managed to get in here? What kind of magic did the little

man have?

Jesus. He'd thought that Billy – the Doctor – had wanted his approval and his praise, but that had been just a ruse to stop Gordy hitting the Doctor's little queer friend. Gordy felt sick. How stupid did the Doctor think he was?

Something hard and cold pressed against the back of his thighs. Gordy reached down with his hands. It was the top of the open safe. The safe where 137

he'd kept all the letters and photographs before the Doctor had come and spoilt his blackmailing operation. Just like he was spoiling everything Gordy tried to do.

The safe had belonged to his older brother. Gordy had been forbidden to go near it when Albert had been alive, because it was where Albert kept the gang's payroll and their father's service revolver. It was still there on the bottom shelf. Gordy had been surprised when he'd discovered that the Doctor hadn't taken it when he'd burnt all the documents.

Gordy quickly knelt down and retrieved the gun from the back of the safe.

It felt cold and incredibly heavy in his hands. It had always scared the life out of Gordy. He pointed it directly at the man who had been Billy Spot. Well now it was going to scare the life out of the Doctor. Permanently.

Everyone in the room backed away from him a little. Gordy was pleased to see the smile slip from the Doctor's blistered face. They were scared of him now. Good.

'Not so frigging clever now, are you?' Gordy said, trying to keep his voice level, but it kept cracking. 'We'll see how frigging clever you are with a frigging bullet through your frigging face.'

The Doctor only stood there, silent and impassive.

The room brightened as the disembodied voice of the devil spoke again.

'Why haven't you deactivated the Toy as I ordered?' he hissed.

'Toy?' Gordy didn't know what he was talking about.

‘The boy. Dennis. Destroy it as I have shown you. Destroy it now or our contract is at an end.’

Gordy didn’t take the gun off the Doctor. ‘I will. I promise. But first I’ve gotta do something else.’

‘You don’t have to do what he tells you to do,’ the Doctor said. ‘You have a choice. Why should you choose to hurt a little boy? What possible reason could you have to do such a terrible thing?’

Gordy smiled. ‘Because the devil wants me to and once I’ve. . . I’ve killed all the people he wants dead, then he’s going to help me to take control of Soho.’

The Doctor shook his head, sadly. ‘But you know he isn’t really the devil, don’t you?’

Gordy sneered. ‘You’re just trying to save your skin by twisting everything.

I’m not stupid.’

The Doctor took a step forward. ‘I’m not the one who thinks that you’re stupid.’ He gestured towards the large glass ball which was alight with a fiery incandescence. ‘I can’t say the same for the scientist who speaks to you through the globe.’

‘Scientist? What are you talking about? Keep back,’ Gordy ordered, as the Doctor took a second step towards him. ‘I’ve got a gun.’

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‘Then you’ve got nothing to be worried about, have you?’

the Doctor

replied, taking a third step. ‘Gordon, listen to me. If the voice in the crystal ball really belonged to the devil, would he need you to do his evil work for him? If it really was the devil in there, why doesn’t he just drag his victims down to the Gates of Hell himself? The Prince of Darkness would hardly need a mortal man to help him destroy his enemies, now would he? Well?’

‘You’re just trying to trick me,’ Gordy said, his voice uncertain.

‘No, I’m not. But he is. I recognized that globe when I first saw it: it’s part of a device for travelling through time and space.’

Gordy relaxed, feeling his anxieties fade as the Doctor started talking nonsense. He'd lain in bed on many nights fretting over exactly the sort of questions that the Doctor had raised – about the motives of the devil in the crystal ball. As sleep eluded him he would be forced to face the questions which he found hardest to answer: why someone as tough and as powerful as the devil had picked Gordy out from everyone else to reward. When almost everyone else in his life seemed so sure that he wasn't up to anything at all.

The Doctor took another step. The tip of Gordy's gun was only a few feet away from his face.

'I'll use this on you if you don't keep back, Doctor. Don't think I won't. A lot more people are going to get it before I'm done. I'm gonna clean the dross out of my town. With the devil's help I can make it a place for decent people to live.'

'I see,' the Doctor said, his voice filled with quiet distaste. 'England for the English. Until all the faces are white and there's no one different from you at all. No queers, no yids, no darkies.' The Doctor seemed to consider Gordy's dream for a moment. 'I don't think so.'

'Oh yeah? You gonna stop me?'

The Doctor nodded. 'Oh yes,' he said, with absolute confidence.

'You and who's army?'

'That's right.' The Doctor gestured to where Jack, Mikey and Dennis stood.

'Me and my army. Now put an end to the suspense. Decide whether or not you are going to shoot me.'

Gordy disengaged the safety catch on the revolver. It made a threatening click. 'Put you out of your bleeding heart misery, more like.'

The Doctor took a further step. The gun was almost touching the top of his chest. 'What's it to be, Gordy? My life is in your sweaty little paws.'

Gordy couldn't take his eyes from the Doctor's. How could the little man be so calm even as he was looking at death down the barrel of a gun? The Doctor's eyes were clear and focused. It was as if they were looking past Gordy's face and into the very heart of him. It felt as

though the Doctor knew exactly what Gordy was like, deep down.

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Did the Doctor know that Gordy had never so much as pointed a gun at anyone before, let alone fired one? Did he somehow know that even despite having arranged for several people to be killed, he, himself had never had the determination or the courage to take someone's life?

Gordy became aware that someone was speaking. It was the devil.

'Scraton, this is your last chance. Destroy them immediately or our associa-tion is over. Do you hear me?'

And then Gordy knew that he wasn't going to pull the trigger. He couldn't.

Whatever it took to pull the trigger of a gun he didn't have it. He felt a curious stillness for a moment and then the Doctor's hand closed around the gun and he lifted it out of Gordy's fingers.

'When it comes down to it, killing is so much harder than you think it will be,' the Doctor said.

'Maybe for you,' said a young voice, 'but not for me.'

Gordy turned to see Carl climb to his feet. He picked up his razor from the floor where the Doctor had discarded it. 'You should have let me see to them in the first place, Gordy. You should have trusted me. I wouldn't ever let you down.'

Gordy looked at the Doctor. The little man's eyes were full of fear and alarm.

Jack had been watching the Doctor's exchange with Gordy from where he lay on the floor. The Doctor was hypnotic. It was as if he had talked the gangster out of killing them with his words. Somehow Jack knew that the Doctor's words wouldn't have any effect on the psychotic Carl.

He'd have to help the Doctor himself.

Jack rolled on to his back and pulled his bound arms over his legs. His hands were still tied together, but at least now they were in front rather than behind him. Hoping that the same trick would work twice,

Jack slipped behind the knife-wielding man and grabbed hold of the glass sphere.

The last time he'd held it, the glass had been dark and cold. Now it was ablaze with light and was warm, almost hot to the touch.

'Right, listen to me, all of you,' he shouted. 'Let the Doctor go, or I'll smash this thing into a thousand pieces.'

Gordy, Carl and the Doctor swung round as one. Strangely it was the Doctor who appeared to be most disturbed by his actions.

'No, Jack, put it down. You mustn't hold the device while it's activated. It's more dangerous than you can know.'

'It's our chance to get out of here. Come on, Doctor.' Jack backed away, until he was next to Mikey and Dennis. The brightness of the globe was making it hard to see the others in the dark room. The tips of his fingers started to 140

tingle, as if he had a bad case of pins and needles. The sensation crept up his arms and through his whole body. He tried to speak, but his mouth was engulfed by the tingling even as the first word was leaving his throat.

'Doc–'

Jack felt an unbearable pressure against his eyes and ears and chest for a moment and then. . . nothing.

'Bleeding Hell!' Gordy shrieked, as more of the emerald light escaped from the globe creating a halo around Mikey, Dennis and Jack. The light intensified for a tiny moment, like a star exploding and then it died away completely.

'Where've they gone?' Gordy's question was answered by the mocking laughter of his devil, which echoed around the cellar. The three lads had completely disappeared.

The Doctor pushed past him heading for the stairs. 'To the home of your demon. I told you that was a device for travelling through time and space.'

Gordy glanced around the cellar. How could he contact the devil if he didn't have the crystal ball? Panic gripped him. How could he apologize to his devil if he couldn't speak to him? How could his devil

forgive him?

The Doctor disappeared through the doorway, leaving Gordy and Carl alone in the darkened room.

The Doctor tore out of Gordy's nightclub headquarters and into the busy streets of Soho. If he was quick he would be able to follow their trail back to the Psychiatric Institute in the TARDIS, avoiding the time-consuming task of calculating the hospital's five dimensional coordinates. He didn't like to think what Moriah would have planned for Jack, Mikey and Dennis when they arrived in Healey.

The streets were thick with people and it was an effort to dart between them and navigate a course to the alley where he had left the TARDIS. He'd lost the key to his ship in one of the several changes of clothes he'd made in the last couple of days, so he sent a telepathic distress call to his ship and hoped that it would open the door for him.

One half of the police box exterior was a tall oblong of blackness. The dear old thing had heard his cry for help and opened the door.

The Doctor increased his speed as he headed for the doorway, almost colliding with the uniformed man who stepped in front of the police box. The Doctor skidded to a halt.

'That's far enough, Doctor,' Sergeant Bridie said. 'Or whatever your name really is. You're under arrest.'

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Interlude

Gilliam's Story

The voice called her name for a second time. It was on the edge of her aware-ness, like a partly remembered song.

'Highness, can you hear me? Answer me, please.'

She was wrapped around something. Something warm. She didn't want to open her eyes. Not yet. Her curled-up body felt stiff and brittle; she feared that if she moved she might crack apart. Perhaps she could just lie here for ever.

'Highness! Please.'

She knew the voice. It reminded her of her stepfather. Protective and

judgmental. It was her chancellor. Ala'dan.

She opened an eye and saw him high up above her, fluttering about anxiously.

'You're alive!' The old man shouted and clasped his spindly hands together.

Gilliam looked about her. She was lying at the botttom of a deep pit. Had she fallen? She was hugging a large glass ball to her stomach. It was warm and lit from within. The sphere was one of several which described a circle in the underground chamber.

The bird/globe

And then she remembered finding the entrance to the gateway the previous night. Sinking down into the dark. Leaving her stranded, away from the protection of her thermo-tent. The warmth from the strange spheres had kept her alive, kept the freezing desert night at bay. The first queen of Kr'on Tep had built well.

Thank you, Petruska.

Gilliam climbed to her feet and looked up at Ala'dan. 'I'm all right. You can stop praising the man-god now and think about how you're going to get me out of here.'

Ala'dan nodded. 'I'll send a message to the king.'

'No,' Gilliam ordered, more harshly and quickly than she had intended.

'Don't do that. I. . . er. . . don't want anyone to know that I did something as stupid as falling down a hole in the ground. There should be null-gravity 143

equipment in the shuttle or failing that you could just find some rope. You head the government: use your initiative.'

'Highness?'

'What?'

Ala'dan looked down at her and smiled warmly, his face cracking into a thousand lines. 'It is good to see you alive.'

She waved her chancellor away, but was grinning to herself even as

his face disappeared from the lip of the pit. It's good to see you too.

She turned her attention to the chamber she had discovered. The smile was wiped from her face when she found Petruska's remains. The skeleton was partly disintegrated, several of the grey spokes of the first queen's ribcage were broken. A deep crack ran down the centre of her skull.

Gilliam knelt by what was left of Petruska's body for what felt like a long time, a well of sadness growing in her stomach. Petruska hadn't escaped: the gateway she had created to flee her oppression had become her tomb. The histories of Kr'on Tep were correct. Moriah must have discovered Petruska's and Tol'gar's secret plan and killed them both. Gilliam glanced around the chamber; there didn't seem to be any signs of Tol'gar's remains and she wondered, absently, what might have become of them. The details of what had happened all those years ago seemed less important now that she knew Petruska hadn't succeeded. She could leave the points of history to the professor and his students.

It was only then that Gilliam realized exactly how much she had invested in Petruska's life story. How much her own decision to abandon her life here was tied up with the first queen having escaped from Moriah's grasp. Now that she knew how Petruska's life had ended, it was as if she had lost the confidence to make changes to her own. Even if she did leave the king, where would she go?

Gilliam only noticed the hieroglyphs as she returned to the square of light directly beneath the hole, preparing to wait for Ala'dan's return. They were scratched hurriedly and crudely into a dimly lit part of the wall. Compared to the beautiful and elegant symbols in the bedchamber above, these were a desperate scrawl. Gilliam almost didn't bother to translate them. Only the thought that the sweaty professor would be the first to read Petruska's last words, caring only for the use he could make of them, changed her mind.

With a broken hand I write of this betrayal Moriah has clipped the wings of this bird The circle is no longer complete and so the door is locked for ever I am not to think of a life without him

And so what use have I for my life at all 144

'Don't you see?' Gilliam exclaimed to Ala'dan, when he had returned from the shuttle and thrown down a null-gravity belt which lifted her gracefully out of the underground chamber. 'Moriah didn't murder

Petruska because she was unfaithful to him, she killed herself – it was the only way she could ever have been free of him.'

'That would certainly fit with your translation, but, well, what difference does it make now, Highness?'

'What difference does it make? Ala'dan, it makes all the difference in the world. Don't you see? She made a choice. In the end her choice was between a life with Moriah or death. And she chose death.'

Ala' dan looked puzzled. 'And was that a wise choice?'

'It was *a* choice. Sometimes that's enough. It must have been Tol'gar who betrayed her; he was probably reporting back to Moriah all along. Moriah must have confronted Petruska before she could leave. The bastard beat her up –'

'And removed one of the spheres in the circle in order to prevent her escaping?' the old chancellor suggested, looking up from the translation Gilliam had jotted down in her notepad.

'Yes. And that's a part of all of this which I don't really understand, because the circle is complete. Complete and functional after all this time. It was the warmth from the bird/globe that kept me alive last night.'

'Someone must have replaced the missing sphere later.'

'But who?'

'Highness, how else could Moriah have fled Kr'on Tep never to be seen again?'

'You mean Moriah put the sphere back after taking it away?'

Ala'dan nodded. 'Who else?' he asked, and walked to the doorway of the bedchamber, before turning back to face her. 'He would have returned to her rooms sometime after their argument, perhaps racked with guilt for hurting the woman he loved.'

'I wouldn't count on it,' Gilliam muttered.

Ala'dan shook his hand and gave her an admonishing look. 'Come now, Highness, this man was in love with her to the exclusion of all else, of course he would feel guilty. He would be looking for forgiveness from his love.'

Ala'dan mimed entering the room and searching for the queen.

Gilliam smiled as she watched him cross to the hole in the floor. Ala'dan was caught up in his performance, like a detective acting out the crime in a movie's final scene. Gilliam was reminded of how important the story of Moriah and Petruska was to the people of this planet. Several sects still worshipped Moriah as a god. They weren't going to like her new version of events.

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'And what would Moriah have found down there in the darkness?' Ala'dan asked, rhetorically, as he stood at the edge of the pit. 'He would have found the woman he worshipped dead. Killed by her own hand. And all because of his own terrible actions.'

Gilliam joined the old man and looked down into the depths. 'So he replaced the sphere and fled Kr'on Tep.'

Ala'dan nodded. 'Before anyone could learn of his folly. And so his son became king, a line of rule which has continued to this day.' He put a hand on her shoulder. 'And so you have the answers to the questions which brought you here. Will you now return to the king's side?'

Gilliam looked away. She hadn't expected Ala'dan to be so direct.

'Highness. . . Gilliam, do you doubt his feelings? You need not, for he loves you above all others.'

'I know,' she said, her mouth tight.

'It is not easy for a husband to explain why his wife does not wish to sit beside him. It is harder still for a king. For all his bluster, the king is a private man, but I know that his heart aches, and he has been so patient –'

'Enough, Ala'dan!' Gilliam hadn't meant to shout. 'That's enough,' she said, more quietly, back in control.

The sudden silence between the two old friends was painful for Gilliam to bear. Perhaps it was painful for them both. Gilliam didn't know how to break through it.

'I should inform the king of what you have discovered here,' the chancellor said, his voice carefully formal. 'No doubt he will wish to come and see for himself.'

‘Whatever,’ Gilliam murmured.

Ala’dan made to leave, but something held him back. ‘You won’t. . . touch anything, will you, Highness?’ he said, and then gathered up his robes before hurrying from the chamber.

Gilliam walked around the room, rereading some of the familiar passages on the walls, the chancellor’s words echoing in her mind all the while. The unspoken meaning of them was clear. He was really asking her not to leave.

Not to try and use the bird/globe device to flee her husband, just as Petruska had once tried to and failed.

The task was over. There wasn’t any reason to stay in the ruined palace any longer. If she intended to remain with the king then she might as well return to the royal barge now. There were meetings to be rescheduled, ambassadors to be apologized to: all the usual components of royal life aboard the *Jewelled Sword*.

Or.

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Or she could gather up the few possessions which she had brought with her and – well, leave. Standing in Petruska’s room, the choice felt unavoidable.

Even standing still and doing nothing until Ala’dan arrived with the king was, in effect, a choice.

Later, when she thought back to this moment, she couldn’t put her finger on exactly what it was that had finally made up her mind. Perhaps it was the noise of a shuttle crossing overhead which just might have turned out to be the king? All she could remember was turning very deliberately on her heel, collapsing the thermo-tent and stowing it in her holdall, before adjusting the control on the null-gravity belt and gliding down over the side of the pit and into the darkness.

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10

You’re Gonna Need Someone On Your

Side

‘Sergeant, I really don’t have time for this!’

‘You’ve got all the time in the world, all the time in the world.’

‘If you would just contact Inspector Harris, he’ll explain everything. In fact, you ought to contact him immediately. I’m informally assisting him with a murder inquiry and he’ll be very angry that you’re keeping me down here.’

‘Is that right?’ Sergeant Bridie pulled a packet of Players out of his pocket and lit one, offering the packet to the Doctor who was seated opposite him.

The Doctor shook his head irritably, and drummed his fingers on the table.

‘I packed that in centuries ago. Knocks years off your life.’

‘Centuries ago?’ Bridie chuckled. ‘You don’t seem to have done so badly,’ he said and blew out a cloud of smoke.

‘Would you mind not doing that? I’m sure I must have the right to clean air or something?’

‘You have the right to a solicitor. You’ve already refused to see the duty solicitor.’

‘Why would I want to speak to a solicitor?’ the Doctor said, looking genuinely puzzled. ‘A spot of late-night conveyancing perhaps? What I want is to see Chief Inspector Harris or, better still, to be released.’

‘Well, Chief Inspector Harris doesn’t want to see you. You’ve caused him a considerable amount of professional embarrassment.’ Bridie leant forward.

‘Why did you do it, anyway?’

‘Do what?’

‘Well, there’s impersonating a hospital pathologist, for starters.’

The Doctor sat back in his chair. ‘Ah,’ he said. ‘You know about that, do you? I never actually claimed to be a pathologist. I was just, well, mistaken for one.’

‘When Chief Inspector Harris found you, you were conducting an autopsy in the Middlesex Hospital.’

‘Ye–es.’

‘Are you employed by the Middlesex Hospital?’

‘Not exactly.’

‘Not exactly?’

‘Not at all, actually.’

‘You see, “Doctor”, that doesn’t surprise me, particularly as you appear to hold no medical qualifications whatsoever.’

‘Not on this planet anyway.’

Bridie narrowed his eyes. ‘I really can’t decide whether you say these things just to annoy me or because you’re actually completely unhinged.’

‘Sergeant, I’ve already had to prove my sanity once this weekend,’ the Doctor said, wearily. ‘Please don’t make me have to do it all over again.’

‘Then tell me, what you are up to, Doctor? Tell me why you’ve got yourself involved in all of this?’

The Doctor fanned the sergeant’s smoke away with his hand. ‘It really is very simple. I’m just trying to help. I realize that you humans can find it hard to accept that others might act out a sense of altruism, but it’s true. I have no personal agenda in any of this.’

‘I find that very difficult to believe.’

‘Which is precisely the point I’ve just made. Well, you’re not the first, but for once it’s true. I arrived on this. . . I arrived in Soho on Friday night. I came across an injured boy lying in an alley. I took him to hospital, I tried to save him –’

‘That was you! I should have known.’

The conversation wasn’t going quite the way the Doctor had planned it.

The more he tried to explain himself the deeper he seemed to dig himself into trouble. Still, there was nothing for it now –

'Yes, that was me. I suspected that Eddy Stone wasn't. . . well, wasn't. . . '

'Normal?' Bridie supplied. 'Well, it's bloody obvious that he was a queer.'

'No,' the Doctor frowned, 'that's not it. Actually I suspected that he wasn't human.'

Bridie burst out laughing. 'You think he came from another planet?'

'No, I did think that for a little while, but I was wrong. He is a native of this planet. But he's not human that's all. Humans are born, generally speaking, and Eddy Stone wasn't so much as born as, well, grown.'

Bridie stubbed out his half-smoked cigarette. 'I see,' he said. His voice sounded calm, but something about his tone was ringing warning bells in the Doctor's head. 'Grown? Like a fruit perhaps?' Bridie sneered.

The Doctor sighed at the bitter joke. This wasn't going to be easy. 'No, not like a fruit. Eddy Stone was an artificial person. Grown from human cells collected by the black cab. But I'm beginning to think that Moriah had underestimated his Toys.'

Bridie's anger surged out of nowhere. 'Who do you think you're dealing with? A complete fool?' Bridie raged. The Doctor suddenly realized that he had misjudged the sergeant's mood entirely. The sergeant was furious with him, furious and scared. It was as if the Doctor's presence threatened him somehow.

Bridie reached over the table and pulled the Doctor towards him by the collar of his shirt. 'Don't you see how much trouble you're in?' he shouted.

'The way you behaved at the hospital we could probably do you for murder.

And all you can do is tell more of your stupid lies.'

'That's ridiculous. Why would I have taken the boy to the hospital if I

was the one who attacked him?'

Bridie appeared lost for words for a moment and then started, somewhat desperately, on a new tack. 'I saw you coming out of the Scraton brothers' nightclub. They're prime suspects in this investigation. You're working for Gordy Scraton, aren't you? You probably killed Stone at the hospital on Gordy's orders.'

Bridie was pulling back his fist, preparing to strike the Doctor, when the interview-room door swung open and Inspector Harris ran in accompanied by two constables. He took one look at his sergeant, cursed, and then pulled him off the Doctor.

'What the bloody hell do you think you're doing, Bridie? They can hear you all over the station.' Harris turned to the constables. 'Get him out of here.'

The Doctor rubbed at his throat. 'No. Wait,' he rasped, hurrying around the table. Something the sergeant had said was troubling him, something about the Scratons. 'How do you know that Gordy Scraton is involved? I thought the police didn't have any suspects for the murders?'

'We still don't,' Harris interrupted, looking at the Doctor with undisguised contempt. 'At least not until now.'

The Doctor met the Chief Inspector's gaze evenly. 'So why am I being accused of being in league with the Scratons?'

'Scratons?' Harris snapped. 'What is this interest in them about? Albert Scraton is dead. There's only Gordon left and he couldn't hold the gang together. They disbanded months ago.'

'Try telling that to Carl Scraton.'

'Carl Scraton? You mentioned him before. I've never heard of him.'

'Ask your sergeant. He seems to know all about them.'

Harris turned to Bridie, who was being held between the two constables.

'Well?'

'The Doctor's off his head, sir,' Bridie whined, his discomfort evident. 'You said so yourself.'

Harris just stared at his sergeant, then he gestured to the officers to take him out of the room. ‘Let him cool off outside for a bit. I’ll talk to him later.’

When they were left alone in the sparsely furnished room, the Doctor straightened his tie and shirt collar. ‘I’d be careful of your sergeant, Chief Inspector. He seems to have access to information that he couldn’t possibly have access to unless –’

‘Unless he was as deceitful as you, perhaps?’

‘I was going to say unless he was in league with the people behind the killings,’ the Doctor said, ignoring the insult. He gripped his lapel with one hand and rubbed his chin with the other. ‘Yes, Moriah would need to have agents throughout London searching for the escaped Toys. How long has your sergeant been employed here? Was his transfer unusual in any way?’

The Doctor was taken aback when Harris got hold of both his shoulders and shook him roughly. ‘You just don’t stop, do you? I’ve had enough of you and your stupid ideas, Doctor whoever you are. Do you hear me? Not only have I been taken off this case, but I’ve been bloody suspended because of you. There’s going to be an inquiry into why I allowed an imposter to become one of my advisors. So, I don’t want to hear another word out of you. You’ll be held here overnight and charged in the morning.’ He rapped on the door.

‘Constable. I’m done in here,’ he shouted through it.

There was an awkward pause. Eventually, the Doctor said, ‘I’m sorry that I lied to you, Chief Inspector. When you discovered me in the mortuary I didn’t have much choice but to play along with your assumptions.’

‘Nonsense, Doctor. You could have told me the truth.’

The Doctor glanced down at his shoes. ‘Yes, yes I suppose I could have. It’s just that I didn’t think that you would believe me.’

‘I see. And what exactly is it that I wouldn’t believe?’

The truth tumbled out of the Doctor. ‘That I’m a traveller in space and time.

I realize that's hard to believe, but it's the truth. Remember the creature, the strange taxi?' the Doctor added quickly, as he saw Harris raise his eyebrows impatiently. 'Could that have possibly originated on this world?'

The door to the interview room opened and an officer entered.

'Well could it?' the Doctor pleaded; but he could sense that the attempt was futile. As he was bustled out of the room by the officer, the Doctor made one final attempt to convince the chief inspector. 'I know who is responsible for the killings. I know because I've met him. The creature that swallowed both Jack and I took us back to his lair. Now Jack is in danger. Please. Don't let anyone else die.'

And then the door was closed after him and the Doctor was dragged down to the cells.

* * *

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Harris stood in the empty interview room for a long moment, before he returned to his cubby-hole of an office. He didn't miss the sniggers from the desk sergeant and a couple of inspectors as he crossed the foyer to the lift.

He was the biggest joke Charing Cross had ever known. There were already a whole series of gags about him going around the staff canteen. The lift took an age to arrive. When he finally entered his office, he slumped behind his desk and pulled out the bottle of whisky he kept in his filing cabinet. He poured a large measure into his coffee cup and set it down on his desktop and stared at it.

He'd lost the case, possibly his job, and certainly any chance of promotion in the next century. Not to mention any respect he'd ever earned from his colleagues over the years. And all because he'd believed the Doctor and his lies. He ought to hate the little man. But he couldn't find it in himself to feel hatred towards the Doctor. He was angry with him. He was *bloody* angry with him. But he couldn't imagine ever hating someone who was infuriatingly unique as the Doctor.

A traveller in space and time.

No, it was impossible. The very idea was preposterous. Wasn't it?

The cell door slammed shut behind the Doctor. The clanging of metal on metal rang in his ears for a few moments. He leant against the door staring down at his shoes while he waited for the noise to recede. His shoelaces had been removed, presumably to prevent him from trying to hang himself, and without them his feet felt as if they were rattling around inside his battered spats.

He had a companion in his cell. An elderly rake of a man who was sprawled on one of the concrete benches. The Doctor wandered over and went to doff his hat before realizing that he'd lost it somewhere along the way and so scratched his head, unnecessarily, instead.

'Hello, I'm the Doctor.'

'Good show,' the man whispered. 'Got here in the end then. What kept you?'

'I wasn't aware that I was expected,' the Doctor answered, perching next to him on the bench. 'Can I be of assistance?'

'Bit too late for that I'm afraid, old chap.'

The Doctor surveyed his new patient. There weren't any obvious signs of injury, although the man's skin looked dangerously thin, almost translucent.

The Doctor hesitated before resting his hand on the man's forehead to test his temperature, for fear that the slightest pressure might tear the old man's fragile body.

'Did young Cwej send you?' the old man asked.

The Doctor froze. 'Christopher Cwej?'

'That's the boy. Nice young man. Turned a few heads at the club, I can tell you. Saved a few lives too.'

'That sounds like Christopher.' The Doctor felt oddly choked. He'd barely thought about Chris since they'd parted. He'd deliberately put him out of danger and out of mind. Thinking of Chris only reminded him of Roz and he wasn't ready to face those feelings. He couldn't. Not yet.

'How did he save lives?'

‘There was a fire at the club. Christopher got everyone out. Came back for me.’

As much as he had tried to protect Chris, it was clear that the young man had found his own adventures in Soho, just as the Doctor had.

You can’t wrap people up in cotton wool, Doctor, he told himself. Not without suffocating them. He had a sudden desire to see his friend. Since Roslyn’s death, their friendship had become strained, awkward. The Doctor had buried his feelings and, he realized, he’d buried himself with them. An image of Bernice appeared in his head, wagging a finger at him and accusing him of being a typical bloke. The Doctor smiled at the memory of his dear friend. He wanted to see Christopher. Wanted to tell him that he missed Roslyn Forrester too.

‘Did Christopher get the message to Mother?’ the old man murmured, drift-ing off into sleep even as he spoke.

‘Message?’

‘To get our people out of Healey.’

The Doctor’s eyes opened widely. ‘Healey? You sent Christopher to Healey?

When was this?’

The old man only muttered something unintelligible in reply.

Were his friends for ever to be in peril? The Doctor gently loosened the old man’s cravat. His patient protested a little as the Doctor probed the base of his neck. There were two pronounced lumps beneath the skin on either side of the old man’s throat. They were swollen to the size of plums, inflamed and sore.

‘Not long now,’ the old man whispered, confirming the Doctor’s thoughts.

‘Please,’ the Doctor begged. ‘Please wake up. You must tell me what you know.’

The whisky glass was still full on Chief Inspector Harris’s desk. He’d made a promise to himself that he would either drink it and then go home to tell the wife that he’d been suspended. She’d probably be pleased; Olive was always complaining that she didn’t see him from one day to the next. If he didn’t drink it, he would go down to the

hope of continuing his career in law enforcement to the wind. The Doctor had said that he knew the killer's identity. Harris wasn't at all sure that he could bear to live with the knowledge that he had passed up the opportunity to solve the case which had tormented him over the last few months.

And despite the lies the Doctor had told, Harris couldn't shake the impression that the Doctor was essentially a good man. When the boy, Bartlett, had been sucked into that terrible car, the Doctor had risked his own life to save the lad. And where had the monstrous vehicle taken them? What had they seen?

Another voice in his head was telling him – yelling at him in fact – that he was utterly crazy even to consider trusting the Doctor again. The mysterious little man had lied to him, he'd stolen police property, and, according to Bridie at least, was caught up with one of the West End firms. Harris had to admit that he would feel a lot more confident about the Doctor if he didn't keep the company of drunkards, criminals and deviants.

Harris pulled his warrant card out of his jacket pocket. He took a long look at it and then tucked it away in his desk. Ceremoniously, he poured the glass of whisky back into the bottle and screwed down the lid.

'Sorry Olive,' he muttered, 'looks like I might be late for tea again,' and then he left the room, closing the door quietly behind him.

'I'll lose my job over this, Doctor, but I don't belong here anymore.'

The Doctor hurried over from where he had been tending his elderly cell-mate. The little man was grinning like a seven-year-old. 'Chief Inspector Harris, I could kiss you.'

Harris took a step backward. 'I may be under a suspension, but I'd remind you, Doctor, that I am still an officer of the law.' Harris was relieved when the Doctor contented himself by patting him on the arm.

'My friends are in danger. Are you prepared to come with me, Chief Inspector?'

'Where to?'

‘To the creature’s lair, Chief Inspector. To the madhouse.’

‘Bugger off! We’re closed.’

Harris and the Doctor exchanged glances.

‘Are you sure we need this

woman’s help, Doctor?’ the policeman whispered.

‘Oh, absolutely,’ the Doctor said confidently, and adjusted his battered fedora. The Doctor had insisted on stopping off in Soho in order to change.

Now back in his tweeds, Harris thought the little man seemed more relaxed.

He rapped loudly on the door for the second time. ‘Open up, I’ve a message for one Tilda Jupp. From an old friend. A military friend.’

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There was a short pause. Harris glanced down the wrought iron fire escape. What was he doing here? He knew about Soho’s drinking clubs, of course. They were just one of the many illegalities in the area which the police tolerated, just as long as they didn’t thrive. Their patrons were mostly theatre people. The clubs had started to meet the demand of actors looking for somewhere to drink after the curtain had fallen on the evening performance.

Compared to blackmail, prostitution and unlicensed gambling, the odd bit of late-night drinking was low on the list of policing priorities. Still, that didn’t mean that it was acceptable for an officer of the law to patronize one of the bars. Harris was about to suggest that they retire to a café for a rethink when the battered door of the club opened and a woman’s head appeared. She was squinting to avoid the smoke from a cigarette which dangled from the corner of her mouth. Her beady eyes glared intently at the Doctor.

‘Well look who it is, the mysterious Doctor,’ she barked and clapped her hands together in delight. However, when she caught sight of Harris, her face fell, as did the cigarette. ‘Busted!’ she cried. ‘At ten in the morning, now that’s just not playing fair! Little Miss Doctor’s a snoop and she’s brought the law down on me.’ Tilda tried to slam the door, but the Doctor jammed one of his battered spats in the way just in time.

‘Tilda, it’s not a raid. Honestly,’ he shouted, gritting his teeth as he pushed against the door. ‘Please let us in: it’s important. I know who’s killing your people. Moriah’s behind it all. He’s kidnapped Dennis. I need your help to save them.’

The woman must have moved away from the door, because the Doctor suddenly tumbled into the room, landing in a clownish mess in the middle of the floor. Harris poked his head into the club and then made a more cautious entrance.

The room stank of stale cigarette smoke and alcohol. No one had bothered to clear up from the previous night and wineglasses littered the tables.

Brimming ashtrays had erupted their debris over the surfaces. There was little ventilation and no fire exits. Harris screwed up his face; the place was a positive death trap.

The woman called Tilda Jupp had hurried over to one of several old sofa’s in the room. She tore away a blanket which covered the sofa, revealing two young men beneath. They were dressed only in their vests, underpants and socks, and were fast asleep, their arms casually draped around each other.

Harris flushed and looked away. Bloody Hell! What next, for Heaven’s sake?

‘Attention!’ Tilda barked and the two lads opened their bleary eyes.

‘Leave it out, Mother,’ one of the boys groaned. ‘It’s the middle of the night.’

‘Better get your frocks on, daughters, unless you fancy picking oakum into the next century. It’s a raid.’ When they caught sight of Harris the two young 156

men swore, expressions of utter horror crossing their faces. Panic stricken, they scrambled to their feet, grabbed their clothes and, without pausing to dress, scurried out through a curtained doorway at the back of the club.

‘Best barmaids in London,’ Tilda remarked, watching their retreating backs.

‘At least they would be if that Andrew didn’t guzzle half my profits. Honestly, she drinks a quarter of a bottle of my gin, tops it up with

water and expects no one to notice. Must think I came down with the last shower. Saeed's an angel, well, besides trying to get poked by half the punters that come through that door. But besides that: perfect. Wouldn't know where I'd be without those girls.'

'I'm sure,' the Doctor muttered, impatiently. 'Tilda, it's really not a raid –

the inspector is only here in an informal capacity.'

'A what?'

The Doctor waved away her incredulity. 'He's here as a friend. We're planning an expedition to Healey, to the Institute. The Major said you could help.

Will you come?'

Tilda looked genuinely shocked by the suggestion. 'Go back there? You've got to be joking, Doctor. Do you know what Moriah would do to me?'

'Yes,' the Doctor said, and walked over to her. 'Yes, I do.' Harris watched as the little man traced his fingers gently around the base of her neck. 'He'd make two incisions here –'

Tilda grabbed hold of his hands and angrily pushed them away from her throat. 'Don't. That's not remotely amusing. Just. . . don't.' Harris thought she looked angry enough to hit the little man. Angry or scared enough.

'That's what he is going to do to Dennis unless we stop him,' the Doctor said, evenly. 'That's what he's going to keep on doing to your people, unless we stop him.'

'We can't fight him,' Tilda hissed. 'You don't know what he's like.'

'No, I don't,' the Doctor said. 'But you do. And that's why I need your help.

That's why Jack, Mikey, Dennis and probably Chris do too.'

'Your friend Christopher?' Tilda glanced at her watch. 'He and Patsy ought to have made it back by now. I wonder what's keeping them?'

The Doctor's brow furrowed. 'You could come with us and find out.'

Tilda appeared to come to a decision. ‘Very well.’

‘Good, let’s get back to the TARDIS.’

Tilda frowned. ‘TARDIS. Is that your mode of transport? I’ll bet mine is faster.’

‘Faster than a time machine?’ the Doctor smiled. ‘I doubt it.’

‘It’s parked around the back. Come on, I’ll show you.’

* * *

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Chris waited in the cab while Patsy checked to see if Mother was at the Tropics.

He looked up at the old tenement which housed the club; it felt like an age since he had cautiously climbed those stairs.

The Chinese boy who didn’t have a name was awake now, sitting in Chris’s lap and staring out of the window. Something about the boy disturbed Chris.

It wasn’t just that the boy was quiet – and so far the boy hadn’t spoken a single word – it was more than that. Chris couldn’t remember a single expression crossing the boy’s face since he’d first met him. It was as if the boy didn’t have a personality at all. The lights were on but there was nobody home. Chris ran his fingers through the boy’s fine black hair. The boy sniffed a little in response.

The cabby was chattering on, but Chris was too tired from the journey back to London to pay any attention. He stared out of the window, taking a rare opportunity in his travels with the Doctor to watch the passing of an ordinary day in a different century. It had started to drizzle and the pedestrians in the city were now walking hurriedly through Soho. The streets they walked on were drab and grey. The cities of Chris’s day were neon bright, garish and loud; every available space taken up with advertising messages and images, the walkways which stretched between the mile high towers alive with the chatter of a thousand races.

Across the street a dreary tailors advertised ELITE STOCKING REPAIRS. 1/6

PER STOCKING. That was another thing, Chris mused, here everyone wore the same sort of clothes. Variations on a suit. Casual wear didn't appear to have been invented yet. The only people who wore jeans were the workmen drinking tea from flasks as they put up office blocks over the last remaining bomb sites. Everyone else on the streets looked as if they were on their way to a job interview. The air of formality in the city was stifling. And beneath the veneer of bland respectability, you could never really know what people were like, or what was really going on in their lives.

Patsy appeared at the window of the taxi, looking concerned. 'There's no one at the Tropics. Not even Saeed and Andrew, and I've never known them rise before late afternoon. Strange.'

Chris shrugged. 'So what now? Do we wait?'

'No,' Patsy said, coolly appraising the situation. 'Mother feared that the Tropics was under surveillance – it would be safer if we stayed out of Soho.

We'll go back to my place.'

'Your place?' Chris exclaimed. Of course Patsy would have a home here. It was just that – why was that so hard to imagine?

'Hammersmith, please, driver,' Patsy said, as she climbed in next to Chris.

She looked at him and smiled. 'What?' she asked, after a moment.

'Nothing. Nothing at all.'

Patsy's home turned out to be a large house on the river, a little way down from Hammersmith Bridge. Patsy put the nameless boy to bed in one of the many bedrooms and then led Chris into a darkened sitting room. The room reminded Chris of a funeral parlour – stuffy and formal. It was hard to imagine anyone living in the room.

'Nice,' Chris commented out of politeness, although he was feeling uncomfortable. Cut flowers were everywhere in the room, on every surface. There were so many that several bouquets were still wrapped in paper and had been left neatly stacked on the floor. All the blossoms were dry and wilting.

Chris narrowly avoided stepping on a wreath. He remembered Patsy saying that she was a widow, but that her husband had died five years ago. He wondered who the wreath was for. 'Did somebody die?'

'What? Oh, those.' Patsy paused and turned back to the hearth where she was preparing to build a fire. 'Oh, they're just from admirers, you know, my fans.'

'Your fans send you wreaths?'

'Oh you know what fans are like.'

'Evidently not.'

He picked up the wreath, a small card was attached. *With deepest sympathy on your recent loss.* 'Patsy, what's this?'

Patsy crossed the room and lifted the wreath out of his hands. 'Leave it, Chris,' she said curtly, 'those things give me the creeps.' She threw the flowers on to an ornate sidetable which was already brimming with bouquets.

'OK, OK, I'm sorry,' he muttered, and suddenly realizing he had nothing to do with his hands, he stuffed them into his pockets.

The room appeared to be a shrine to her late husband. Large photographs of the two of them together adorned the walls, smaller pictures were mounted in a series of frames which sat on a baby grand piano in the corner of the room.

Robert Burgess had been a fat, middle-aged man in life. He looked as though he drank too much. There was a large wedding photograph over the fireplace. Patsy was looking happy but vacant in the picture. She was plastered in make-up and her wedding dress squeezed her bust together, exaggerating her figure to almost comic proportions. Her new husband was holding her arm tightly in his, a smug expression on his plump, glossy face.

Chris took an instant dislike to the dead man.

Patsy stood up from the hearth as the first flickers of flame licked at the wood. She caught sight of Chris staring at the picture and sighed. 'I've been meaning to get rid of all of those.'

'Why? He must have been so important to you to keep them up for all this time. It's only right that you'd want to remember him.'

Patsy shrugged. ‘He’s dead, he’s gone. What use is all of this to me now?’

She patted the pockets of her jacket. ‘Damn, I’m out of smokes. I think the housekeeper keeps some menthol in the kitchen. I won’t be a minute.’

Chris smiled. ‘I’ll go. You always get so ratty when you can’t have your fix.’

Patsy smiled, warmly. ‘That’s right. Bring them upstairs, I’m going to run a bath.’

Chris found the cigarettes tucked away in the cutlery drawer of the small tidy kitchen and, obediently, trotted upstairs with them.

‘Are you decent?’ he asked, knocking on the bathroom door.

‘Not particularly, come on in.’

The bathroom was luxurious; white tiled with gold fittings. Framed gold discs decorated the walls.

‘My late husband’s triumphs,’ Patsy commented dryly, from the centre of a huge circular bath, which was full of frothy bubbles. ‘Of which I was the last.’

Chris sat awkwardly on the edge of the bath keeping his eyes very consciously on the metal circles on the walls. He handed Patsy her cigarettes.

She took them from him and then made a playful grab for him, trying to pull him into the bath, but he was too quick for her and leapt back into the room.

‘Spoilsport,’ she moaned, hanging on the rim of the bath. ‘Christopher, come on in. There’s room for two. Actually there’s room for about eight. I mean, can’t you just lighten up and have some fun, for Christsakes!’

‘I. . . ’ Why was this so difficult? It reminded him of something. As if he’d been here before. In exactly this situation. *I’m not worthy of you,* he heard himself saying. To Roz. He’d said that to Roz, while they’d kissed, self-consciously and awkwardly, back in Little Caldwell.

‘Forget I mentioned it,’ Patsy snapped, and pushed herself away from the side. ‘If you don’t want me, that’s fine.’

‘It’s not that. . . it’s just. . . ’ Chris started and then ran out of words. Patsy sat in the middle of the bath and pushed her blonde hair away from her face, exposing dark roots near her scalp.

‘It’s just what, Christopher?’

‘Nothing,’ he said.

And started to tug off his shirt.

Tilda Jupp pressed the accelerator pedal to the floor and the little open-topped MG sports car leapt forward, skidding around the tight country bend before hurtling on into the morning light. ‘An old flame gave it to me. Nifty, eh?’

‘Madam, are you aware of the speed limit?’ Harris shouted against the wind. Perched on the tiny back seat, he was beginning to wish that he had 160

brought his warrant card with him. They’d only been on the road for an hour and this woman had already committed over a dozen serious traffic offences.

‘Don’t be ridiculous, Chief Inspector,’ she barked brightly. ‘The only positive aspects of being in the countryside are clear roads and no police officers.’

‘Present company excepted, I hope?’ Harris shouted, hanging on to his hat with one hand.

Miss Jupp eyed him through her driving goggles with open suspicion. ‘Well, we’ll see,’ she said, and narrowly missed a head on collision with a tractor.

The Doctor was in the passenger seat wrestling with an Ordnance Survey map, which flapped wildly around him, like a panic-stricken swan. For some inexplicable reason, his hat appeared to be entirely wind-resistant.

‘Next left, second right, then a sort of squiggly bit, left around a church, right around a village and then straight up a crease in the page. Can’t miss it.’

‘Right you are!’ Miss Jupp sang gaily, and swung a left at the next junction, sending up a spray of small stones as she did so.

‘Slow down. Please,’ Harris wailed.

Tilda turned to the Doctor and shook her head. ‘Lilly Law doesn’t half go on, doesn’t she? I don’t know how you put up with her, Doctor, I really don’t.’

Harris was busy clinging on to the interior fittings and missed the Doctor’s reply. Lilly Law! Every single sentence the woman uttered seemed designed to provoke him. He sank back, as much as one could sink into the tiny back bench of the sports car.

He’d thrown away a perfectly good career in the Force for this. Why hadn’t he just gone home and enjoyed his suspension? He could be having his lunch now. Reading the *Herald* while Olive chattered on about the neighbours and the latest outrage at the church social.

Tilda cut the engine as they approached their destination. They coasted silently down towards the gates of the Institute. The Victorian building was just visible through the trees. It looked innocent and slightly grand in the cloudy midday sun. Tilda pulled the car off the road as they neared the entrance to the grounds, breaking sharply and almost sending Harris flying into the front of the small car.

‘Here we are,’ she announced and gave him a disapproving look. ‘All in one piece.’

Harris watched her step out of the car, clamber on to the bonnet and from there lift herself up on to the wall of the grounds of the Institute. Effortlessly, the Doctor scampered up after her. Harris sighed and followed, struggling to pull himself on to the top of the wall.

This was trespassing, he told himself. Harris rather suspected that the day’s record of offences wasn’t going to end there. When he’d finally straddled the 161

wall, he paused and took in the unkempt grounds and the large Gothic house in the distance. Catching his breath, he thought, I’m getting old.

‘I never thought I’d be back here,’ Harris heard Tilda Jupp say, her voice a cocktail of bitterness and fear. ‘I’ve prayed every night that I would never step foot in this place again.’

Interlude

Gilliam Comes Home

Gilliam dropped suddenly, as if a trapdoor had opened beneath her feet. She fell into infinity. Spiralling through a swirling, kaleidoscopic nowhere. She opened her mouth to speak but instead of words her thoughts were ripped out of her mind, forming a series of images from her past, each image linked to the next making a paperchain of memories through the core of the shimmering vortex.

The story of her life, stretched out like a coloured streamer across the wall of an office party.

– *eighteen clumsy and shy I went to Europe and* I'll show you uncle there's these two guys who are travelling and one's quite cute although I'm not going to tell you that *in the water something snags my ankle and strange British youth who's got one eye on my* Jesus it's bigger on the *invector gauge* sarcasm is not your strong point *only enough for one* makes me a very egotistical young lady *Mondas* Telos *I can never remember which* I think one of them is still wandering in the corridors of the *well nobody likes transmutification do they* stealing brain fluid and planning to take over the Universe *what again*? argue mostly *you left me behind* you left me behind *you left me behind* you left me behind *you*
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11

All I Have To Do Is Dream

'Something's coming,' the Doctor whispered, and ushered them back around the corner of the building. 'Hide!'

Harris hadn't heard anything, but such was the authority in the Doctor's voice that he took shelter behind a parked ambulance next to the little man and Tilda Jupp. They waited in silence for what felt like an age. Harris was reminded of playing hide and seek as a boy and began to feel a little embarrassed that he was crouching in a car park. He convinced himself that the Doctor had been mistaken, and was about to step out from their hiding place, when he heard the sound of laboured breathing.

Someone was coming. Getting down on his hands and knees, Harris saw a man's legs and feet on the other side of the ambulance. The shoes were sturdy and practical, the trousers neatly pressed and black. A uniform? Perhaps an ambulance driver or a hospital orderly? What

was Harris going to say if the man found him crouching there with his two odd companions?

Harris climbed to his feet, he couldn't resist taking a look at the man. He moved to the cab of the ambulance and peered through the passenger window.

He'd been right. The man in the orderly's uniform was framed in the driver's side window. He had his back to Harris and was carrying a length of chromed metal in one hand – it looked like a. . . fork. Two sharp prongs, and made out of the same reflective metal that surgical instruments were fashioned from.

The rasping breathing was louder now. It didn't sound like a man, more like. . . like a large, dangerous animal. The orderly turned his head forty-five degrees and Harris let out a little gasp.

The Doctor pulled him down roughly and slapped a hand around his mouth, the little man's bright blue eyes glaring with mute fury at Harris. 'Ssh.'

No face. The orderly hadn't had a face at all. Just smooth pale flesh, like uncooked dough. Harris shivered and felt bile rise in the back of his throat.

He prised the Doctor's hand from his mouth and crouched there by the wheels of the ambulance, cradling his head in his hands and trying to breathe silently.

No face. It was unthinkable. Horrible. How could such a thing be possible?

After what might have been a few seconds – or perhaps an hour – the Doctor tugged at Harris's coat sleeve.

'I think it's safe to move on now.'

Harris let himself be led away.

Jack's nose itched. Every few minutes he had to press his face up against the wall of the padded cell and rub it against the plastic walls. Plastic walls which smelt of urine and disinfectant. The only light in the room came from the gap under the cell door; a strip of sickly yellow that leaked in from the corridor outside. Jack could just make

out the outline of Mikey's head next to him.

The faceless creatures had pulled the leather threads of the straitjacket tightly behind his back, before hoisting him up in the air from behind and fastening the final strap of the straitjacket between his legs. His groin ached from the pressure of the strap, making him feel continually light-headed and nauseous.

Mikey was sitting next to him. From his irregular breathing, Jack could tell that his flatmate was crying. Mikey had struggled desperately when the faceless men had separated them from Dennis – soon after they had material-ized in front of the grey man in the underground cavern. Jack could still hear Dennis's terrified squeals as he had been carried away.

They were going to kill Dennis; the grey man had said so. Moriah was tall and muscular, like a stone golem from a storybook. In a quiet voice, almost a whisper, he had ordered that Dennis was killed. It didn't make any sense.

Why would any one want to kill Dennis? What reason could anyone have for killing a child?

Jack wanted to say something reassuring to Mikey, but he couldn't find any words. Everything that came into his head sounded trite and stupid. He wanted to say that the Doctor would come for them, that the Doctor wouldn't let Dennis die. But they had left the Doctor alone at the Scratons'. Two against one. Jack remembered the last time the Doctor and Carl Scraton had fought, hearing the Doctor's agonized cries as he was buried beneath Carl's pounding fists. What had happened then? Oh, *he'd* saved him, hadn't he? Jack had saved the Doctor, bringing the heavy glass sphere down on the thug's head.

Blimey, had that really been him?

Feeling stronger, more confident with himself, Jack shuffled across the floor until the side of his bound arm was touching Mikey. Back at Mrs Carroway's, he had always been careful to avoid physical contact with his flatmate, worried that Mikey might get the wrong idea. At night, when they undressed for bed, Jack would make a show of not looking over at Mikey's side of the room.

Mikey leant over him, resting his head on Jack's shoulder, and began to cry.

Horrible deep sobs that made his body shudder as they fought their

way out of his chest. ‘What am I gonna do, Jack? What am I gonna do?’

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Jack’s neck was wet with tears. He wanted to pull Mikey into his arms, suddenly furious that he wasn’t able to comfort his friend. ‘It’s OK,’ he whispered, over and over again. ‘The Doctor will come, he’ll save Dennis, he’ll save us all.’

Perhaps if he said it enough times, then he could will it true.

Footsteps. Coming closer. The light under the door of the cell was blocked by someone standing outside. Someone or something. Jack pushed his back into the soft padding of the wall behind him. Had the creatures come for them?

Voices. One of them was a woman’s – upper class and terribly affected, like an overzealous actress in amateur dramatics. ‘Look Lilly,’ she barked, ‘I said I’d been here before, I did not say I was a qualified tour guide.’

‘Madam,’ a second, male voice growled, ‘would you please stop calling me that.’ Jack thought he recognized both voices, although he couldn’t place them.

‘Ssh, both of you,’ a third voice added, sounding impatient and frustrated.

‘This is supposed to be a covert operation, a rescue. Do you want to bring more of Moriah’s creatures down upon us?’

Jack would have known those rolling R’s and that soft Scottish burr anywhere. ‘Doctor!’ he shouted. ‘Doctor!’

‘Jack?’

The door opened, filling the darkened cell with light. Silhouetted in the doorway was the reassuring outline of a small man, wearing a fedora hat and holding an umbrella with a question mark for a handle. The new light made Jack’s eyes water. Either that or he’d burst into tears. He couldn’t be sure and he was too pleased to see the Doctor to worry about whether or not anyone thought he was crying.

‘You came,’ he said, simply.

‘I’m sure it must be visiting time,’ the Doctor smiled, and gave both boys a friendly hug. Just seeing the Doctor filled Jack with hope. The little man’s ice-blue eyes were alive with interest, darting into every corner of the horrible, stained room. ‘I see they’ve given you their full care and attention,’ he quipped, ruffling Jack’s hair with his hand.

Mother and the policeman, Harris, followed the Doctor into the room and set about loosening the straps of the straitjackets. Of course, the arguing voices had belonged to them. It was strange to see Tilda here – Jack had never seen her out of her club. Why had the Doctor brought her with him? How was she involved with this? Looking at her now reminded Jack of the portrait in Moriah’s quarters. The portrait of Queen Petruska. Tilda was avoiding eye contact with the policeman; someone else, Jack thought, who didn’t get along with the grouchy police inspector.

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‘Dennis. Where is he?’ Tilda demanded, holding Mikey by the shoulders.

‘You simply must tell us.’

‘The creatures took him,’ Mikey started, his face wet with tears. ‘The creatures with no face. I tried to stop them but I couldn’t. We’ve got to get to him, stop them hurting him.’

‘We will stop them,’ the Doctor said, and the certainty in his voice made Jack feel warm inside. ‘But first I need to know what’s going on.’

‘Moriah,’ Jack said. ‘It was Moriah.’

‘Bastard!’ Tilda exclaimed.

The Doctor appraised her carefully as he helped Mikey out of the restraint, as if he were about to ask her a question. Tilda frowned at him and moved to the door, to keep watch on the corridor. The Doctor watched her for a moment, as if considering whether to follow her, but then he turned back to Mikey. ‘Tell me about Dennis,’ he said, softly. ‘He’s not really your brother at all, is he?’

Jack was surprised by this question. Surprised and a little angry. Didn’t the Doctor realize what Mikey had been going through since they had been locked away in here?

Mikey's reaction to the question was not what Jack had expected. Instead of getting annoyed, he just looked away, embarrassed.

'I ain't got no brothers,' he said, finally. 'Two sisters back in Kingston, but no brothers.'

The Doctor nodded, as if this was exactly the reply he had expected. 'Go on. Please.'

'When I came to London, to England, I was on me own. I don't get on with me family, but I still miss them, you know? And then one evening I got home from the site – Jack was out with his man –' Mikey glanced at Jack and then quickly away.

'And?' the Doctor asked, his face alive with curiosity. He was standing close to Mikey, peering up intensely at him and making tiny circling motions with his hands, urging the lad on.

'And he was just there, you know? On the step, crying his eyes out, like a little lost calf. The kid needed someone to look after him, so I did.' Awkwardly, Mikey met the Doctor's intense gaze. 'I always knew that it was too good to be true, but I don't care. He's me kid brother now, and –' he shrugged '– and I love him.'

The Doctor grinned, suddenly and naturally. 'I just love human beings,' he said and reached out and tapped Mikey on his flat nose. 'No logic to your behaviour at all, and yet you're so irresistible. How do you do it?'

Mikey frowned and backed off, wiping the tears from his face with the back of his hand. 'Are you making fun of me?'

'Perhaps just a little and I really don't mean to. Of course he's your brother.

Don't ever doubt it. You wanted him so much that you willed him into existence. The answer to all your prayers sitting on your doorstep, like a birthday gift.'

Jack didn't like the way the Doctor was talking. It was frightening to think that the Doctor wasn't human, that he came from somewhere else, somewhere Jack couldn't imagine. But that wasn't what really disturbed Jack. While listening to Mikey's story he had found himself thinking about his own life. Of an afternoon outside Holborn library.

He only half heard the Doctor turn to where Tilda stood in the doorway and say, ‘You arranged for Mikey to find Dennis on his doorstep, didn’t you? For how long have you been planting your little gifts throughout the city. How many? Fifty? A hundred?

Tilda stood in the doorway, hugging her thin arms to her rakish chest. ‘I’ve lost count. My people need friends, Doctor,’ she said. ‘Special friends to care for. To provide what is most needed.’

‘To *be* what is most needed,’ the Doctor corrected.

Jack’s eyes rested on Tilda’s impassive face, but he was seeing an image from his past: the most beautiful boy he’d ever set eyes upon stooping to help him retrieve his fallen library books. Ocean-blue eyes framed by long dark lashes.

What Jack had most needed.

‘Eddy,’ Jack said, tears welling up in his eyes again.

‘Yes, like Eddy Stone,’ Tilda said neutrally.

Jack felt something inside himself die. A little flame of hope and. . . love, snuffed out, leaving him hollow inside.

‘Time for action,’ said the Doctor. ‘We’re not out of this yet.’

The little boy looked like an angel in sleep. Like a cherub. Julia Mannheim had to remind herself that the anaesthetized child was not real but only a mass of cloned cells grown from human tissue. An organic instrument, with as much autonomy as her reflection in the mirror.

So, why do I always sweat when I do this? Julia looked up to see Moriah’s dull grey eyes on her as she prepared the instruments for surgery.

The director had explained everything and of course it made perfect sense.

The unconscious boy had ended up at the Institute due to an unfortunate mistake at Chelmsford General Hospital. The Doctor was a patient left over from the project. What else could explain his bizarre behaviour and strange stories? Moriah had asked. Julia had already begun to admonish herself for being taken in by a patient’s delusions. She was supposed to be a doctor after all.

Quickly, she found the glands at the base of the Toy's throat and marked the points where she would make the incisions with a thin black crayon. The two glands which secreted the empathic fluid were deep below the surface of the Toy's body. Remove them and it would quickly cease to function.

And the little boy on the theatre table in front of her would die.

She shook the thought out of her mind and picked up a scalpel from the instrument tray. Julia Mannheim could feel the director's presence, his eyes burning into her as she worked.

'Is there a problem, Doctor Mannheim?' Moriah enquired softly, from a position close to the door.

She glanced over at him, only his grey eyes were visible above his surgical mask. She shook her head, 'No, director, everything's fine.'

'Not getting sentimental?'

Julia forced a smile. 'About one of the Toys? Don't be ridiculous.'

'Good. You understand how important it is for all the rogue therapeutic instruments to be deactivated. I will leave you to your work. If you should need me, I will be in my study.'

She felt rather than heard him leave the huge, shadowed operating theatre.

Julia exhaled slowly and felt her body relax. His presence always made her feel claustrophobic, hemmed in, as if she were under constant surveillance. It was something to do with his eyes, they looked so old and tired.

She would finish up here and then go and have a lie down.

Pulling the Toy's skin taut between her fingers, she prepared to make the incision with the scalpel. She pressed the blade to the Toy's throat, felt the skin begin to part.

Someone made a tutting noise behind her. Julia froze, a tiny scarlet line appearing in the scalpel's wake.

'What kind of Mother would I be if I let you do that to one of my boys, hmm?' The woman's voice was hard, and filled with judgment and

contempt.

Julia whirled round to see a tall woman standing near the door to the theatre. The woman was tall and rakishly thin. She was holding her chin tilted upward, her dark eyes fixed on Julia, like an eagle targeting its prey. Julia thought she looked like English grandeur personified.

‘ *Your* boys?’ Julia could only stutter in reply. The aristocratic woman intimidated the hell out of her.

The woman ran long fingers through her severely combed back black hair, before striding across the room to where Julia stood. She plucked the scalpel from between Julia’s fingers and put it firmly back in its tray.

Julia could only watch as the woman lifted the anaesthetized Toy from the table. As she gathered the boy in her arms a look of recognition passed between them.

‘I know you,’ Julia murmured, trying to remember where she had seen this mysterious woman before.

The woman nodded, curtly. ‘It’s time we had a little talk, gal.’

Tilda Jupp lit a filterless cigarette and pulled heavily upon it as she walked through the forest of dormant Toys which were scattered through the abandoned ward. She left clouds of hazy smoke behind her in the room’s stale air.

Julia had watched the woman hand the little coloured boy to the Doctor.

Somehow Julia hadn’t been at all surprised to see the little man again. The Doctor had sat the unconscious boy on his hip, as if he’d been looking after children all his life. Julia wanted to say something to the Doctor, but he lingered at the doorway, content merely to watch the proceedings.

Two teenagers entered the room soon after that. Julia recognized one of them as the juvenile male from the mortuary. The Doctor had said that the boy was his friend. The other was a tall, lanky West Indian, who cried out with joy when he saw the coloured boy in the Doctor’s arms. Julia knew the expression on his face all too well; she’d seen

that aura of bliss many times before in her work at the Institute. The West Indian was bonded with the Toy.

Her professional curiosity was aroused – she had only ever seen Toys interact with people with severe mental illnesses. She found herself wondering what needs the Toy was reflecting in the young coloured man. That the Toy had been transformed into a child was an indicator in itself. Perhaps the West Indian desired to be needed, to be depended upon, to be necessary.

There wasn't time to explore this interesting clinical development. The whole project was over and this incident needed to be sorted out, and quickly.

Julia was aware that she hadn't yet alerted Moriah. If she was honest, she knew that she wanted to find out more about what was going on here for herself, before Moriah could exert his overbearing presence over the proceedings.

Thinking of Moriah reminded Julia Mannheim of where she had seen the aristocratic woman before. Julia turned to where 'Tilda' was standing. That was it, she was one of the early results of the Petruska Programme – the director's own private research project.

'Tilda' had paused by one of the dormant Toys which stood like a starved and broken tree in the middle of the ward. She gently caressed the mannequin's arm. Julia was shocked when it stirred under Tilda's touch for a moment, before slipping back into stillness. 'Tilda' was quite unlike any of the therapeutic mannequins that had operated at the Institute.

'I don't understand,' Julia began, trying to give voice to the many questions in her mind. 'How can you exist like this?' She gestured at the young West Indian man who was holding the child tightly in his arms. 'Where is *your* 171

patient? Who are you bonded with? Why do you have these personality traits and physical characteristics? Whose needs are you reflecting?'

The 'Tilda' Toy only returned her gaze, her face a mask, and wrapped her arms around the frozen Toy, its chest beginning to rise and fall in the embrace.

Slowly, it began to come alive. Julia was unsettled by 'Tilda' touching the dormant Toy. She couldn't understand how one Toy could possibly

activate another – surely that ought to be fundamentally impossible?

‘Please leave that equipment alone,’ she demanded, trying to fill her voice with authority.

For all her affectation, ‘Tilda’ looked genuinely shocked by the request.

‘Equipment?’ she said, a look of horror crossing her face as if she couldn’t quite bring herself to believe what Julia was saying. ‘Equipment!’ Now she sounded angry. ‘That’s really how you think of us, isn’t it?’ she said, beady eyes narrowing. ‘Don’t you understand? These are my people. You may have made us with your so called science,’ she said, spitting out the word, ‘but we are a race of free people.’

Julia had never heard a Toy talk like this before. ‘No. No you’re not. You can’t be. You’re an emotional mirror reflecting the needs of your patient. You don’t have a life of your own. You can’t. Wherever you go, whatever you do, you will be offering a therapeutic relationship to the patient with whom you are bonded. You’re a therapist, not a human being.’

‘Tilda’ laughed, humourlessly. ‘I could say the same about you.’

Julia shrugged off the insult. ‘Then explain how you could have become sentient?’

‘Tilda’ glared imperiously at her. ‘ *I* don’t have to explain anything to you! *I* know who I am. Just because we live in relation to others does not mean that we aren’t real people.’

Julia didn’t like the way was arguing. It was too close to the ethical issues she had raised with Moriah during the planning stages of the work. Was the definition of a human being really the ability to live independently? Was the essence of being human the ability to survive in isolation? In the end, the research team had agreed that it had to be. Julia had always felt uncomfortable with the idea that what differentiated her from a Toy, what made her human, was her capacity to be alone.

The Toy called ‘Tilda’ was still talking. Julia felt embarrassed and angry that she was being made so hot under the collar by one of the therapeutic mannequins. She had a nagging suspicion that might be reacting to her own ambivalence and uncertainty with the work at the Institute. She cut across

‘Tilda’s’ words with all the authority she could muster. ‘Listen. Listen to me.

Moriah made you. I watched your body grow from a clump of cells. Not in a womb, not in a human being, but in a glass tank filled with a chemical so-172

lution. You were designed to offer empathy, positive regard and congruence: the core conditions of any therapeutic relationship. That’s all! That’s all you are!’

‘Tilda’ just stared at Julia, defiantly. Julia was aware, suddenly, that she had screamed the last sentence. She tried to compose herself. Perhaps she should call Moriah, after all? The ‘Tilda’ mannequin had hooked deeply into her emotions and personal issues and she was losing hold of her objectivity and detachment.

The Doctor coughed in the silence, walking out of the shadow of the wall.

‘Doctor Mannheim, I was just wondering to myself what you meant by the term “congruence”.’

‘What?’ Julia snapped. Feeling flustered, she turned to face him.

He tapped his chin with his umbrella handle. ‘I know what empathy and positive regard mean. What does it mean to be congruent?’

Julia sighed and began her lecture. ‘It’s been found that personal change is facilitated when the therapist allows themselves to be whoever he or she really is. To be without a front or façade. Therapeutic movement takes place when he or she is experiencing and communicating what he or she is genuinely feeling in relation to the patient.’

‘I see. Thank you,’ the Doctor said. He paused for a moment before raising his hand. ‘I’ve got another question.’

‘Yes.’

‘How can someone be genuine and not real at the same time?’

Julia went blank. ‘What do you mean?’

‘Just what I say. You say the Toys offer genuine emotional responses to their patients. How can they do that if they don’t have genuine

emotions in the first place?'

Julia had opened her mouth ready to begin her rebuke before she realized that she didn't know the answer to the Doctor's question. 'Because. . . because. . . ' The explanation eluded her.

'Could it be that the Toys have the capacity to feel?'

'I can't believe that, and even if it were true, it doesn't change anything.

Without patients to bond with, the Toys just wither and die. They are nothing on their own. I've seen it happen a hundred times. Don't get sentimental, Doctor. The Toys are not capable of an independent existence, or of independent thought.'

The Doctor glanced at 'Tilda', who had looked away, disgusted with what she was hearing.

'I think therefore I am,' the Doctor pondered. 'Rather an outmoded concep-tion of existence and a rather lonely philosophy, don't you think? Very male, very macho of course, very eurocentric.'

'Euro – what?' Julia asked, incredulous.

It was the Doctor's turn to be impatient. 'There are places on this world –

and on others for that matter – where people understand themselves only in relation to one another: as beings who are interlocked with one another. I am because we are. We are because I am. In parts of Africa, your individual with her firmly drawn self/other boundaries would be thought of as someone who was suffering from a sickness, out of touch with their *ubuntu* and their *botho*.

Your self-reliant, autonomous individual would be an object of pity, perhaps even contempt.'

'Yes but that's just Africa. . . ' Julia started and then her voice trailed away as she realized what she was saying. Jesus. What the hell was she saying?

'We mustn't make ourselves alone,' the Doctor said, and nodded to himself as if he were saying something which he knew to be very true.

‘We mustn’t try to cut ourselves off from the people around us. To isolate ourselves is such a childish thing to do.’ He paused for a moment and then added, ‘A good and wise woman taught me that.’

Julia put her hands up in front of her, wanting to bat away the Doctor’s words. She needed something to crack through his argument. ‘Remember Benjamin, Doctor? What about that poor boy? “Ned” encouraged him into danger. Encouraged him to climb on to the roof. If he hadn’t been there –’

‘Accidents happen, Julia. People die. And sometimes children do terrible things.’

‘And sometimes parents do too,’ the ‘Tilda’ mannequin added, icily. The thin woman gestured around the abandoned ward. ‘Look, *deah*. If you won’t help us, then let me take my people from this place before they are all murdered.’

Julia looked at ‘Tilda’. Really looked her. At the lines on her face and her intense dark eyes. For a long moment the two women stood in silence, and then Doctor Julia Mannheim, MD PhD came to a decision. ‘All right. Let’s get your people out of here,’ she said, and unbuttoned her white lab coat and let it fall to the floor.

Still standing amongst her army of sleeping lovers, Tilda arched an eyebrow.

‘All of them?’

‘All of them.’

The tension in the room dissolved. Julia felt an enormous weight lift from her shoulders. Having made her decision her mind filled the logistics of the task ahead. How were they going to get the remaining dormant Toys out of the building undetected? Her train of thought was interrupted by a new voice.

A gravelled whisper so low that it could have scraped the floor of the deepest ocean.

‘No. *I* think not,’ the new voice said. ‘ *I* think that everyone will remain exactly where they are.’

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Moriah’s huge frame blocked the doorway. He was accompanied by

half a dozen blank-faced therapeutic mannequins, dressed in the uniforms of hospital orderlies. Julia was shocked to see that each of them carried a weapon, a kind of long, twin-headed spear.

Jesus Christ! Julia swore to herself, feeling a wave of anger rise up through her. What the hell had been going on here? What had Moriah been doing with the results of their work?

He glowered at Julia for a moment, before turning his attention to where Mikey stood holding Dennis in his arms. Moriah lifted his arm and pointed the gun in his hand at the boy.

175

Interlude

Home At Last

At exactly the moment Gilliam finally convinced herself that this journey was without end and that she was destined to fall through the metallic clouds of light for ever, the physical Universe began to tug at her body, pulling her through a multiplicity of dimensions for which she could find neither words nor concepts. She felt her body begin to slow or fall or slide, and glimpsed a tear forming in the fabric of one of the sheets of kaleidoscopic light that was rushing up to meet her.

With a little cry of alarm, she emerged into real time, sprawling on a hard, uneven surface, eyes watering and gasping for breath. The ground beneath her was cold and unyielding. Her hands and knees were stinging with pain.

She opened her eyes and discovered that she was lying on rough dark rock.

The wild, raging lights of the gateway had gone, replaced with a soft emerald glow emitted from a series of familiar green spheres around her.

She was in a huge dimly lit cavern, cathedral high and glistening with moisture. Was this where Moriah had fled all those years ago? A staircase had been cut into the rock, leading up into the shadowy roof of the cave. There must have been at least two hundred steps; there was no way she was going to be able to make the climb after her ordeal in the gateway.

Gilliam's hands went to her waist. She was still wearing the null-

gravity belt Ala'dan had given her. She adjusted the controls and felt gravity let go of its hold on her. Slowly, she drifted up into the shadows.

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12

Hold On To Your Friends

Julia Mannheim wilted under Moriah's gaze. She was ashamed with herself that she actually felt relieved when he turned away from her to point his gun at the boy. Why was she always so paralysed by his presence? It was as if his will filled the room, preventing her from taking any action against him at all.

The young coloured man, Mikey?, was yelling at Moriah, pleading with him not to fire. Even the Doctor looked indecisive, trying to edge forward, but fearful in case he provoked Moriah into using his weapon. 'Oh my God,'

Julia whispered, as she realized that there was no one in a position to prevent Moriah from killing the boy. Ten minutes ago she would have conducted the operation to deactivate the Toy herself, and yet now the idea filled her with horror. A deep pit of despair opened somewhere inside her as she watched the blank-faced creatures Moriah had brought with him spread out through the room. They moved silently and gracefully, their spears poised, ready to be thrown. Natural hunters. What had she been engaged in all this time?

Moriah released the safety on the handgun.

Click.

'Enough Moriah!' Julia heard a woman's voice order. 'That is enough!' A deep tremour of fear ran through her body when she realized that it was her own voice. *She* was shouting orders at the director.

Moriah's gaze flickered in her direction for a moment, but he kept the gun trained on the boy in Mikey's arms. 'You really are a very sentimental woman, Doctor Mannheim. I suspected as much. You are no longer required here. You may leave. Do so now.'

It took a moment for Julia to realize that everyone in the room was waiting for her to respond. And she had absolutely no idea what to do. All she could feel were her legs trembling violently beneath her. She

felt as if she might topple over at any moment.

‘No,’ she breathed, barely audible even to herself.

‘Pardon?’ The huge man asked, he actually sounded surprised at her disobedience.

‘I. . . I won’t,’ she said, more loudly and with greater certainty. ‘What you’re doing is wrong. What we’ve been doing is wrong.’

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‘It’s a little late in the day to start getting qualms about research ethics.’

‘Better late than never, *deah*,’ Tilda commented, striding across the room and stepping in front of Moriah, blocking his line of fire.

For the first time since he had walked into the room Moriah looked as if he wasn’t quite in control. Julia noticed a slight tremour grip the mannequin nearest to her just as Moriah looked shaken. Somehow these warped versions of the therapeutic mannequins were connected to him, acting on his will.

‘Petruska,’ Moriah began, staring at Tilda, an expression of disbelief on his face. The gun wavered slightly in his hand. ‘How. . . ? No. For a moment I thought, but no,’ he said, recovering his composure. ‘I remember you now.

The Petruska Programme, you were the one that escaped.’

Tilda raised an eyebrow and curtsied, a parody of modesty. ‘The very same,’

she said, curtly. She pulled a fresh Guilloise from its soft packet and tapped one end of the cigarette on the back of her hand. The flames of her petrol lighter illuminated her face from below, highlighting her chiselled features.

Moriah took a step towards her. ‘You are the image of her,’ he said, his voice full of longing and awe. ‘It is as if Petruska is standing before me. I could almost believe it is true.’

Julia watched him extend his arm to touch the woman’s face, tentatively.

Tilda grimaced and stepped back out of his reach; Moriah only

received a cloud of smoke in his face. ‘Bugger off,’ she snapped. ‘I’ve had enough of being felt up by sad old men. And I’ve had enough of you.’

Moriah retracted his hand, as if it had been scolded. His face creased with the pain of rejection. ‘No!’ he whined, pitifully. And then the hurt in his face was transformed into anger. He swung his body forward, putting his entire weight behind a punch that sent Tilda flying backward across the room. She hit the far wall, making a small noise in her throat before crumpling, limply, to the floor.

‘I made you!’ he hissed through gritted teeth, as he staggered forward to where Tilda lay motionless. ‘You have no life of your own. Can you not understand something as simple as that? No life without me.’

Shocked by the sudden violence, Julia froze, feeling her breathing spiralling out of control as she started to hyperventilate. She forced herself to breathe more slowly and more deeply, before beginning to move to where Tilda lay.

The Doctor’s reaction was far quicker than Julia’s. He placed himself directly in Moriah’s path, holding up the flat of his hand. ‘Stop,’ he commanded.

‘I will not permit this violence. It’s over, don’t you understand? Whatever you were hoping to achieve here with your obscene experiments is at an end.’

Moriah paused, his sudden burst of wounded rage had passed and he was calmer now. He looked down at the little man in front of him like Goliath amused by David’s audacity. And the Doctor didn’t even have a slingshot.

‘Ah, it is the little Doctor, I wondered if we would finally meet. What am I to make of this strange man who is so anxious to involve himself in matters which are of no concern of his?’ The amusement left Moriah’s face. ‘This is a private matter. It is none of your business. Stay out of my affairs.’

‘This *is* my business. You’re interfering with the lives of people I care about.

That makes this my business. Now, I’m warning you, Moriah, stay away from my friends.’

Moriah shook his head, as if he felt that the Doctor had genuinely misun-derstood the situation. ‘That woman is mine to do with as I see fit. I gave her life. If I choose to bury her then so be it.’

The Doctor stared with incomprehension at the muscular man before him.

‘But why? Why create something so precious only to destroy it?’

‘She is flawed,’ Moriah spat with distaste. ‘Just another failure. I have worked unceasingly to return my betrothed to me. I have searched for longer than you have lived. Searched for longer than any of you can possibly imagine.’

Julia looked up from Tilda’s unconscious body. Finally, she understood what the work at the Institute was really about. She snorted, bitterly. And she’d thought that the Petruska Programme was merely an addition to the main work. But instead it was the task. ‘And all our years of work?’ she said.

‘A means to an end, Doctor Mannheim. Nothing more. You think I care for the disturbed of this world. The bodies of humans have provided the fertile soil on which I have laboured to bring back my bride. That is the extent of my interest in them. Death took my love from me, and it *will* return her.’

Something broke in the little man standing before the giant. The Doctor suddenly had to use his umbrella to support himself as if he were an old man.

Tears filled his eyes, which glistened brighter than ever. The transformation was shocking. Somehow, Julia had never expected to see the Doctor cry.

‘Death doesn’t give us second chances, can’t you see?’ the Doctor pleaded, his voice shrill, as if he were desperate to be understood. ‘If it did, don’t you think that I would have changed the past a thousand times. Don’t you think that I would have brought back all the friends I’ve lost? We have to face losing the people we care for. We can’t avoid it. And it hurts.’ The Doctor pressed his hand against his breast, as if he needed to support his heart. ‘Sometimes it hurts so much I can hardly bear it.’

‘Don’t waste your words on him, Doctor,’ a new voice commanded.

Julia whirled round to see a woman striding into the room, moving

with natural authority despite being dressed in workmen's clothes. Her skin was tanned and her hair blonde and bleached by the sun. Despite this, she looked completely exhausted. Julia Mannheim placed her accent immediately, one hundred per cent New York.

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'Moriah's not telling you the whole truth. Petruska didn't just die. She killed herself. It was the only way to be rid of the man who had made her life intolerable.'

'No!' Moriah roared in anguish, and collapsed to his knees, clutching his face.

Gilliam felt a wave of satisfaction as Moriah knelt in front of her, sobbing like a lost child, oblivious to everything but his hurt. She had never even considered the possibility that he might still be alive after all this time. The legends on Kr'on Tep called him the man-god, and perhaps he was immortal.

He certainly must have lived for uncountable centuries. Thousands of years spent mourning a woman who hated him with every ounce of her being.

He was so different to how she had imagined him. She'd thought of him as a warrior, with a fighter's body, a hard cruel face and dark eyes. In reality, whilst he was muscular, he wasn't a warrior. He was a huge man, bulky and bulging beneath his suit – perhaps he'd gone to seed over the ages. For all his years, his face was unlined and curiously ageless. Only his eyes betrayed his age. As if fatigued from always being focused on events beyond the range of human senses.

She'd seen eyes like those before.

The little man in the tweed jacket, with eyes full of tears, had leapt into action after Moriah had crumpled in distress. Calling over a sandy-haired youth of about sixteen and a middle-aged man in an overcoat and hat whom he referred to as 'Inspector', the three of them had bound Moriah's hands and feet.

Gilliam just stood there watching the strange proceedings. Only now did she fully take in her surroundings. She was in some kind of hospital. It looked old fashioned and uncared for. Forgotten. The abandoned ward was occupied with the strangest mix of people. Gilliam grimaced at the strange, faceless creatures which had stumbled, disorientated, to the floor after she had confronted Moriah.

They now lay twitching and spasming on the linoleum floor.

Puppets with their strings cut.

But despite all this strangeness, Gilliam knew that she had come home. This was Earth. Probably the twentieth century, although she couldn't say exactly when.

She was home.

The little man in the tweed jacket came bounding over, then stopped a few feet in front of her, reigning in his enthusiasm. There could be no mistaking him. He'd changed of course. There wasn't anything left of the man she had known and travelled with. She wouldn't have recognized him from a description or even a photograph. But when she had walked into the room 182

and seen him confronting Moriah she had known immediately. Well after all, who else would be confronting a monster with only an umbrella for a weapon?

Only the Doctor. The person who had abandoned her without a word on an alien planet with a man she didn't love.

'Hello, Doctor,' she said, careful to keep her voice even.

'Hello, Peri,' the Doctor replied, stepping forward a little cautiously. 'How are you?'

She slapped him so hard that he tumbled to the floor.

After the last of the dormant Toys had been carried through the secret doorway in Moriah's quarters, they had barricaded themselves in the underground cavern. There was nothing to do now but wait for the Doctor to fix Moriah's glass spheres so they could transport everyone back to London.

Jack rubbed his aching arms as he sat quietly, watching the Doctor busy himself with the strange fiery spheres. It had been hard work moving all the dormant Toys. It took two people ten minutes to carry one of the frozen mannequins from the ward down to the circle of glass spheres in the cave. If anyone remained in contact with a Toy for more than a few minutes, it would start to come alive, empathically responding to them. Preparing to transform itself into. . . Jack shivered and tried to put the thought out of his mind.

They'd left Moriah in a straitjacket in the same cell in which Jack and Mikey had been imprisoned. Jack grinned to himself, pleased that their enemy was getting a taste of his own medicine.

The woman who called herself Gilliam was sitting on an outcrop of rock a few feet away from Jack. She and the Doctor had barely exchanged a word since she had slapped him across the face. Every few minutes the Doctor would sneak a look over to where the woman was sitting, but she never once met his gaze.

Dennis was still unconscious from the general anesthetic. He lay on the rough ground with his head resting on Mikey's lap. Mickey smiled at Jack as he approached and the two boys sat and talked for a little while. Jack wanted to ask Mikey how he felt about his little 'brother' now that he knew who or rather what he was, but he couldn't find a way of introducing the topic into the conversation.

Jack was surprised when the woman, Gilliam, wandered over.

'Hi,' she said, trying to sound amiable, although Jack got the impression that she was uncomfortable about something.

Jack looked up at her and smiled. She was a striking woman, probably in her early forties, maybe a bit older. Her face was heavily lined around her eyes from the sun.

'I take it that you're the latest?' she asked in her nasal American accent.

Jack frowned. 'Latest what?'

She nodded over to the Doctor. 'Don't you travel with him?'

'Travel? Where to?'

'Oh, it doesn't matter.' She was about to move away when something kept her from leaving. 'Let me give you some advice, kiddo. If he offers you the trip of a lifetime, just remember that's exactly what he means. A lifetime.'

Jack tried to work out what the woman meant. 'You travelled with the Doctor? Did he take you into outer space in his spaceship?'

Gilliam seemed to find something amusing. She nodded. 'Yeah, you

could put it like that. I was only a couple of years older than you at the time.'

'Wow! Really? Do you think –'

'I wouldn't if I were you. "A quick trip around the Galaxy," he said. I was eighteen when we left; I just got back.'

The Doctor was gently putting the last globe back into place, when he looked up and saw Chief Inspector Harris hurrying down the last few steps into the cavern.

'Doctor,' the policeman called, a little out of breath. 'They're trying to break through upstairs. I don't know how long the barricade will hold them.'

The Doctor surveyed his work: it was a bit of a lash-up, but then wasn't it always?

'Ah, Chief Inspector,' the Doctor began. 'Time for us to leave, I take it. I'm counting on you to make sure that the Scratons don't give Tilda and her people any trouble.'

Harris nodded. ‘You don’t have to worry about that. What are you going to do about this Moriah fellow?’

The Doctor shrugged. ‘I really have no idea. Perhaps Moriah will leave the Toys alone now. My first priority is to get everyone away from here.’ The Doctor glanced over to where Peri was talking to Jack. ‘Perhaps if we can find out more about Moriah, then we could find a way to resolve the conflict.’

Harris followed the Doctor’s gaze and then said, ‘Women trouble?’

‘The trouble is all mine,’ the Doctor said, quietly. ‘I made a mistake and I hurt her. This was all a long time ago. I don’t know if I can make it up to her now.’

‘I see,’ the policeman said awkwardly and changed the subject. ‘So is this. . .

this device going to be able to get us all home?’

The Doctor smiled. ‘If I’ve got my sums right then everyone will arrive in Central London about three seconds after you leave here.’

‘After we leave here? Aren’t you coming with us?’

‘I need to stay behind to make sure that the path through the Vortex remains stable for the whole trip. Artificial time corridors have a habit of collapsing or shifting their exit points a few light years without a moment’s notice.’

Harris blinked. ‘It is safe, isn’t it?’

‘Give me a definition of safe.’

‘Never mind. How will you get back?’

The Doctor pointed to the shadows at the far end of the cavern. ‘The Major told me that there are tunnels which eventually lead out into the grounds. It’s the route used by the Toys to escape from the Institute. Don’t worry about me, I’ll be fine.’

‘I want to stay with you.’

‘Yes, yes of course you do,’ the Doctor spluttered, shooing Jack into

the circle to take his place with the others. ‘But you can’t. And I don’t have time to argue, Jack Bartlett. I’m putting my foot down. Right, is everyone ready?

Good.’

The Doctor traced the edge of several of the symbols etched into one of the glass spheres with his fingertips and looked up at the group standing, expectantly, in the circle of spheres. He felt like a photographer at a wedding.

Nothing happened. Tilda tapped her foot impatiently. ‘Technical difficulties?’

Gilliam sighed and stepped out of the circle and joined him by the sphere, deliberately avoiding eye contact with him. ‘It’s important to touch the last two symbols together, Doctor. The bird/globe was designed to be operated by two people.’

‘Was it really? Gosh, how did you ever discover that?’

For a moment the Doctor thought that her hard expression might melt under the warmth of his interest.

‘Well I had plenty of time on my hands,’ she muttered angrily.

The Doctor winced at the barbed comment. He was about to reply when there came a crash from somewhere above them.

‘They’re coming through,’ Jack cried and jumped out of the circle.

‘Jack! No!’ the Doctor bellowed.

Gilliam had already activated the device, her fingers dancing over the surface of the globe. It was too late to stop.

The emerald fire burnt brightly in the centre of each of the glass spheres, filling the cavern with icy white light, blinding the Doctor momentarily. When the lights returned to normal the circle was empty. He glanced at the symbols on the surface of the nearest sphere. Tiny images of animals danced and shifted position across the globe. The corridor was stable. Tilda, Harris, Julia 185

and all the dormant Toys would already be in London. The Doctor nodded slightly to himself in satisfaction. ‘At least they got away.’

Figures with spears were making their way down the steps near the

roof of the cavern. It wouldn't take the creatures more than a couple of minutes to reach them. Gilliam and Jack were standing close by, looking at him expectantly. Waiting for him to weave some magic.

'So, what's the plan?' Gilliam asked. Jack observed that a truce appeared to have been declared in the face of a greater danger.

'Can't you guess?'

'Not Plan B?'

'I'm afraid so.'

'What's Plan B when it's at home?' Jack asked, puzzled.

Gilliam sighed. 'Boy, do you have a lot to learn.'

Jack ran until he was pinched by a stitch in his side. Progress was difficult in the low tunnels and he was relieved to see that the Doctor's old friend was looking equally exhausted. Only the Doctor, typically, showed no signs of fatigue. The Doctor shone his pocket torch back down the tunnel the way they had come.

'I don't hear anything,' the Doctor muttered, his head cocked to one side.

'But I can't think of one good reason for them not to follow us.'

Gilliam perched on a fallen boulder and put her hands on her knees, leaning heavily upon them. 'I'd forgotten about all the running about in dark tunnels.'

She turned to Jack. 'He promised me a tour of all the wonders of the Universe, but it amounted to an extended pot-holing expedition.'

'Don't exaggerate,' the Doctor scolded, as he fiddled with the torch.

'Don't tell me that I'm exaggerating, Doctor!' Gilliam snapped, standing up.

Jack was surprised at how upset she sounded, as if their bickering had ignited a smouldering anger. 'You almost got me killed in the sea caves on Thoros-Beta –' She stopped speaking suddenly. 'And then you left me there,' she said, her voice suddenly small and vulnerable. 'You left me behind.'

The Doctor froze, unable to meet her gaze. After a long moment, he

said, ‘I think we’ve rested for long enough. We ought to press on.’

They were about to move when several figures floated out of the darkness ahead of them.

Jack glimpsed misshapen, bloated faces beneath the veils. The women stood all around them dressed in filthy dark robes.

‘Whoever you are,’ the Doctor said, ‘we mean you no harm.’

One of the women stepped forward. ‘We know. We’ve been watching you, Doctor.’

‘You know my name.’ The Doctor leant forward, intrigued. ‘You have the advantage of me, I’m afraid. I don’t know who you are.’

The woman lifted her veil for a moment. It was all Jack could do to prevent himself from crying out in disgust. The woman’s features floated loosely on her face, as if there were no cartilage or bones to anchor them beneath the skin. Her eyes, nose and lips were distorted and swollen, and quivered sickeningly when she spoke.

‘Are you sure that you do not know us?’

The Doctor reached out to her, gently caressing her face with the back of his fingers. ‘The Petruska Programme. You’re the results of his experiments, aren’t you?’

‘We are Petruska. All of us. We are the brides of Moriah,’ the woman replied. She took hold of the Doctor’s wrist and pushed it away from her face, replacing her veil. ‘We do not require your sympathy, Doctor.’

‘I only wanted to show you that –’

‘We know what you wanted to do. The gesture was unnecessary and misplaced. We do not need your sympathy or your comfort.’

‘Then what do you want? What do you want of me?’

‘Only for you to continue to fight him. For you to become the agent of our revenge. Destroy him for us.’

The Doctor glanced away for a second, before meeting the woman’s gaze. ‘I will try to stop him. I will do my utmost to prevent him

continuing his work.'

'But you will not take his life?' she said, as if she had suspected this all along.

'Not while there is another way. While there is any other way.'

The woman nodded. 'There is no time to argue. Our husband's creatures are very close. Come, we will show you the way to the surface.'

The last stretch of the tunnel was an almost vertical climb. The tunnel narrowed towards the end, it was like trying to climb up the inside of a wine bottle. Twice Jack had been sure that he was completely stuck, and in danger of toppling back down. On both occasions, the Doctor had lowered his umbrella and allowed Jack to pull himself up on its handle. It was as if the Doctor could somehow sense when Jack was in difficulty.

They were nearing the patch of sky revealed at the end of the tunnel when Jack, who was bringing up the rear, caught sight of blank-faced mannequins below them. The creatures were moving quickly, scrambling up the sides of the steep tunnel with no care for where they found their footing. Several of them missed their grip and fell back only to start climbing again, immediately, their place on the rock face quickly taken by another creature.

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Jack felt a thrill of fear. They were like soldier ants, relentless and determined. He looked up at the mouth of the tunnel. He wasn't going to make it.

If he tried to move any faster he was going to fall. Fall down amongst them.

He shivered and continued to climb.

He was within a yard of the top when he felt something grasp hold of his ankle. The grip was so tight it hurt.

'Doctor!'

He glanced down at the empty face staring up at him. Despite having no mouth, the creature let out a whinny of triumph and started to pull him down.

Jack lost his grip on the tunnel wall and his fingers scraped over the rock, painfully. He reached up with his hand for the Doctor's umbrella handle. It was just out of reach, the tips of his fingers brushing against it.

No chance.

'Jack!' The Doctor yelled, stretching down as far as he could. 'Jack!'

When Jack caught sight of the look of impotent rage on the Doctor's face, he realized that his friend didn't know how to rescue him. The Doctor wasn't going to be able to save him this time.

Bizarrely, Jack found himself wanting to apologize to the Doctor. The words were forming on his lips when something blocked the light from the tunnel mouth. At the same time, he was yanked down roughly by the creature which had now reached up and gripped hold of his belt. And then, seemingly from nowhere, strong hands gripped him under his arms. He heard the whine of a strange engine straining, and then he was shot up, out of the tunnel, like a cork from a champagne bottle.

'It's OK. I've got you,' Gilliam said, as they bobbed up and down above the English countryside.

Jack looked down to see the Doctor staring up at them, a look of profound relief on the little man's face. 'You've got me?' Jack asked incredulously as the wind whistled around them. 'Then who's got you?' Was this somehow the Doctor's doing? Part of his alien powers? 'Has the Doctor got you?'

'Yes. I guess he has,' Gilliam said, hugging Jack tightly with one arm and adjusting the null-gravity belt controls with her other hand. 'And he's a lucky bastard.'

13

Alone

Chris woke to find himself alone in the large double bed. He could hear the sounds of someone preparing food coming from downstairs. Was Patsy making him breakfast in bed? He was surprised. This was a side to her which he hadn't encountered before.

His clothes were still scattered across the bathroom floor. Not bothering to search them out and dress, Chris made his way down to the kitchen. The elderly woman washing up took one look at his nakedness and started to scream. His immediate reaction was to move closer to the matronly woman as he tried to explain who he was. But the nearer he got the more panic-stricken she looked and the louder her screams became.

Chris was backing out of the room apologizing when he heard the front door slam. Patsy appeared a few seconds later, clutching two packets of cigarettes in her hand. She quickly stepped between them.

'Goddess, Mrs Benham, I forgot it was your day today,' Patsy exclaimed, and then glanced at Chris, a private, impish grin crossing her face as she ushered him out of the room.

Mrs Benham didn't miss the look. 'Oh I see how it is.' Her panic vanished to be quickly replaced by outrage. 'I'll bet you forgot that it was my day for cleaning today! Didn't want someone to come and disturb you in your bed of sin. What would your husband think? You little trollop. You're dancing on Mr Burgess's grave.'

Chris had intended to slip back upstairs, but he found himself loitering in the passage, eavesdropping on the heated argument in the kitchen. He was shocked by the old woman's reaction. He knew both from history and from his own experience of time travel that people were still incredibly sexually repressed in the Western nations in the mid-twentieth century. He could understand the cleaning woman being shocked and distressed on suddenly encountering a naked man – nudity being such a taboo in this period. It was her bitter anger that didn't make sense to him. Why was she so angry for Patsy to have a sexual relationship with another man? It wasn't as if Patsy's husband was still alive and Patsy was having a secret affair. He'd been dead for five years.

He could hear Patsy's voice clearly from the kitchen.

'What I do in my own house is no business of yours, Mrs Benham.'

' *Your* house, is it? I've cleaned this house for seventeen years. Seventeen years I looked after Mr Burgess. Washed his clothes and ironed his shirts. I knew you were no good for him from the first moment I clapped eyes on you.

Just after his money. For what he could do for you. And I was right. Made you a big star he did, and this is how you go and repay him. The poor man hasn't even been dead a –'

'That's enough!' Patsy interrupted, angrily. 'That's quite enough out of you.'

'Oh, no it's not nearly enough. It's time you heard a few home truths, my girl. You're nothing more than a common slut.'

Chris leant against the wall of the hallway, debating whether he ought to return to the kitchen and offer Patsy some support. However, he suspected that in his present state of undress he'd only be pouring petrol on the already flaming row. He was about to make his way back upstairs just as he heard Patsy give the cleaning lady her marching orders.

Before he could sneak away, Mrs Benham bustled out of the kitchen and, too angry this time to be upset by his nudity, fixed him with a venomous stare.

'I don't know how you can bear to touch that. . . slut. The earth's barely settled on his coffin.'

Barely settled? Chris frowned. 'What do you mean? Whose coffin?'

Patsy hurried out of the kitchen just as Mrs Benham shrieked, 'You mean you don't know? A week her husband's been dead. A *week*! And now she's shacked up with you. The devil's more shame than that cow.' She caught sight of Patsy staring at her. 'I'll not step foot in this house again.'

Patsy marched past her and opened the door violently. 'Seeing as I've just given you the sack you won't ever have reason to, will you? Now get out.'

'Oh I'm leaving,' the old woman snapped, and marched out of the house.

Patsy slammed the door after her and then leant upon it. 'I should have done that a long time ago. Mean old witch.' She raised an eyebrow. 'Do you know a good cleaner? It seems that I'm suddenly in the market for one.'

Chris stared at her, trying to make sense of what had just happened. 'She said –' he started, his mind racing. 'She just said –'

‘Don’t pay any attention to her.’

With deepest sympathy on your recent loss, the card attached to the wreath had read. It was all falling into place: the wreath with the funereal message; all the flowers in the sitting room; the cleaning lady’s outrage. Robert Burgess hadn’t been dead for the last five years, he’d died a week ago.

Goddess, what kind of person was Patsy to be capable of this? And even as he asked himself the question, another voice in his head was asking him how he’d been able to become involved with someone so quickly after Roz’s death.

‘Patsy,’ he said, quietly. ‘When did your husband die?’

‘Just leave it, Christopher, all right.’

And then he knew for certain it was true.

Jack Bartlett finished packing the last bottle of Tilda’s cheap Italian wine into a cardboard box ready to be taken down the road to the nightclub Tilda had commandeered for the party. He collapsed into one of the sagging sofa’s in the Tropics. He still couldn’t believe that the Doctor’s response to all the trouble they were in was to organize a fancy dress party.

The sofa was warm and incredibly comfortable after the drive back from Healey in the back of Tilda’s car. The journey back to London had been without incident, but still filled with tension. The Doctor and Gilliam had barely said a word to one another for the whole trip. As soon as they had arrived in London they’d gone their separate ways. The Doctor had begun to plan the party and Gilliam had left, announcing that she was going to spend the day exploring the city. The Doctor had tried to appear unaffected by Gilliam’s rejection of him, but Jack could tell that the little man was deeply upset. Jack couldn’t help but feel a little jealous of the intensity of feeling between the two of them.

Jack curled up on the sofa and pulled a cushion under his head. After the events of the last few days he felt ready to sleep for a week. Maybe if he stayed quiet Tilda wouldn’t notice that he’d finished with his latest task and he’d be able to catch a quick nap. He found Tilda a deeply intimidating person.

Eddy had always spoken of her in a devoted, almost reverent way and Jack had always felt more than just a little jealous of the special relationship they shared. At least now he understood why they had been so close. Jack was still finding it hard to accept the truth about Eddy.

Tilda strode purposefully into the room and glared at him. ‘What are you doing on your arse, Jack Bartlett? There’s work to be done. This party is not going to organize itself.’

Jack was about to get to his feet, when he decided to risk getting an earful.

‘Give us a break, I’m knackered.’

She arched an eyebrow. ‘The worm turns. I approve. Do you want a drink?’

Jack fancied a pint. ‘Have you got any pale ale?’

‘Pale ale?’ Tilda said, rolling the words around her mouth experimentally before shaking her head. ‘Means nothing to me. There’s red wine or red wine.

I’m saving what spirits I have left for the party.’

Jack had never tasted red wine. He had an Aunt in Darlington who used to get merry on Stone’s Ginger Wine. He’d stolen a swig from the bottle one Christmas and almost thrown up. ‘I won’t, thanks all the same.’

‘You ought to broaden your horizons, *deah*. It’s a wonder we chose you at all.’

Jack felt a bitter wash of resentment come over him, and before he could stop himself, he exclaimed, ‘So why did you? I didn’t ask you to. I wouldn’t have said yes if you had.’

Jack felt sure Tilda was going to shout at him. Much to his surprise and relief she only pulled a bottle of red wine from one of the boxes, retrieved two glasses from behind the bar and came and sat down next to him on the sofa.

‘I didn’t choose you, the Major did. After a night at the Upstairs Room

when you helped clean up after hours.'

Jack remembered the evening. It was the first night he'd ever danced with a man. A sailor called Barry who'd wanted to go back to Jack's place with him, but Jack had been too nervous. Too nervous and too scared of Mrs Carroway finding them and throwing him out; or worse still, calling the police.

Jack shrugged. 'The Major was on his own, his barman had let him down.

I just tidied up a bit, that's all.'

Tilda opened the wine and poured two glasses. Jack felt unable to refuse.

He took hold of the glass and peered down at the mysterious dark liquid. He started to feel queasy at the idea of drinking it.

Tilda took a large gulp from her glass. 'I wasn't at all sure whether you were the right material to join with one of us, but something the Major said changed my mind.'

'Oh, yeah?' Jack said, resentful, but intrigued. 'I didn't realize you were so choosy. I thought that you just conned any old mug into it.'

Tilda looked alarmed. 'It's the most important decision in the world. I wouldn't want to condemn one of our people to someone with no imagination or to someone who was cruel or cowardly.'

Jack looked back down into his drink. He almost smiled. Almost.

'The Major said that he'd seen within you a great capacity to shine. And shine you did. You made Eddy, after all.' She reached over and ruffled his hair. 'You made someone very special, someone unique. We all loved Eddy Stone.'

'I. . . I did too,' Jack said, and it was the first time he had ever dared to say those words out loud. Large swollen tears rolled down his cheeks. He let Tilda wrap him up in her arms and he buried his face in her neck. 'I miss him so much.'

'I know,' Mother whispered, kissing his hair. 'I miss him too.'

Jack broke the hug and lifted his glass to his lips. The wine tasted smoky and exotic; it warmed him inside.

And it didn't make him feel sick at all.

* * *

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Chris picked up his grubby suit from the bathroom floor, pulled it on, and then descended to find Patsy in the sitting room. She was standing by the window, looking out over the river, a cigarette burning down between her fingers, forgotten. The dying flowers had all been cleared away. He watched her for a whole minute – she was so still that she could have been a photograph, but for the shallow rise and fall of her chest.

'Hello,' he said, only to make his presence known.

Patsy came back to life. She turned to face him, resting one hand on her hip and taking both her first and last drag on the cigarette before extinguishing it in a plant pot. But she didn't say anything.

'Well you could at least tell me it isn't true.'

'And would that satisfy you? If I told you that he died five years ago, or ten years ago, would everything be all right then?'

'I. . . I don't know.'

'How long is all right, Christopher?'

Chris closed his eyes and swallowed. 'Goddess, Patsy! Doesn't it bother you at all that your husband's only been dead a week?'

Patsy looked him straight in the eyes and then shook her head. 'No. No, it doesn't. Not even slightly. Does it really bother you?'

'You're damn right it bothers me!' He exploded. 'I mean what is going on here? Just who the hell are you?'

'Don't ask me that question. It's the only one I don't have an answer for.'

'Oh stop being so pretentious.'

'I'm telling you the truth.'

'The truth? The truth!' he sneered at her. 'Patsy, you wouldn't know the truth if it ran up and bit you.'

‘Chris –’

‘Oh, just leave me alone. I don’t even want to be near you. Just. . . oh just go away.’

Patsy looked as if she was going to say something, but then turned on her heel and walked out of the sitting room. A moment later he heard the front door slam and he was alone in the house.

Robert Burgess stared down at him from the wedding photograph above the fireplace, smiling smugly.

The taxi dropped Chris off on the corner of Dean Street and Old Compton Street, and he stalked up the stairs to the Tropics, carrying the nameless Chinese boy in his arms. He’d grown tired of waiting for Patsy to return to the house and decided that he could at least complete his mission by bringing the boy to Tilda as he’d promised. And if he’d stayed cooped up in Patsy’s house for another hour he was going to go mad.

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The door to the club was open and the first thing he noticed was that Patsy was not in sight. Tilda was sitting on a sofa chatting to a teenage lad who looked as if he’d been crying. When Tilda saw Chris she welcomed him by kissing him, ostentatiously, on both cheeks, and then took the Chinese boy from him.

‘You’ve just missed Patsy, Christopher, *deah*,’ she said, something about her tone informed Chris that Tilda knew all about their fight.

He refused the offer of a drink. ‘I just need to find her, Tilda. I need to speak to her.’

‘She’s helping out with the party preparations.’

‘Party? What party?’

‘Fancy dress. Tonight. Too big for the Tropics so a chum of mine is letting us use his new club,’ Tilda said, scribbling the address down for Chris on the back of one of her cigarette packets. ‘Go easy on the gal, Christopher,’ she said, handing over the empty soft pack. ‘She’s got good reason not to tell you the truth about her husband.’

‘Oh yeah?’ Chris couldn’t meet Tilda’s gaze. Instead he stared over at the boy on the sofa. ‘Like what?’

It was Tilda's turn to look away, her mouth forming into a tight line. 'It's not for me to say. It really would be best for you to hear the truth from her.'

'Fat chance of that,' he spat and turned on his heel.

Jack watched as the tall broad-shouldered man in the old-fashioned clothes left. 'Who was that?'

'Christopher?' Tilda said, glancing back at the door, whilst she bounced the little Chinese boy on her hip. 'Oh he's a friend of the Doctor's. From the future.'

The future? 'Blimey! Do you think all the men in the future look like that?'

Tilda only arched an eyebrow in reply.

A large sign above the club bore the legend Ronnie Scott's. Chris pushed open the door and walked into the foyer of the club. There didn't appear to be anyone about. Framed posters on the wall advertised a month of Sundays of rock-and-roll. The names of the singers were all unfamiliar to Chris. Bright young faces with toothpaste smiles and quiffed hair.

A set of tall double doors at the back of the foyer led into a large dancehall.

Chris paused in the doorway. The room was decorated with streamers and balloons and a small stage at the far end of the room had been set up for a band. Chris caught sight of someone moving at the back of the hall, carrying a bundle of streamers.

'Christopher,' the Doctor beamed, catching sight of his friend. 'So tell me, how are you finding the rock-and-roll years?'

The Doctor handed Chris a bunch of brightly coloured balloons, that he'd inflated and tied together with ribbon. 'In the far corner, I think. All right?'

'Whatever,' Chris replied without thinking and set about hanging the balloons. 'I was looking for someone.'

'Oh, the young woman. Patsy, isn't it?' the Doctor said. 'She said she

was going to see if the drink had arrived.'

'Oh.'

'Oh?' the Doctor said, puzzled by his tone. 'Are you all right? I understand that you've been helping Tilda free the Toys.'

'Yes. You too. That's quite a coincidence.'

The Doctor didn't reply.

'It is a coincidence, isn't it?' Chris asked.

'What?' the Doctor said, wrestling with party streamers. 'Oh, yes, I should think so. Although, these days I can never be absolutely sure. Are you all right, Chris? You seem distracted if you don't mind me saying so.'

Chris ignored the question, countering it with one of his own. 'Doctor, why are you organizing a party?'

'Does it bother you?'

'No. It's just not the sort of thing I'd expect to find you doing, under the circumstances. That's all.'

The Doctor dragged a stepladder over to the wall; with both hands occupied, he held on to one end of the long party streamers with his teeth. 'Could you hold the ladder steady while I sort these out,' he spluttered, his mouth full of brightly coloured paper.

Chris nodded and gripped the base of the ladder as the Doctor climbed to the top.

'It's a long story. There's a short version and a long version.'

'I'm not going anywhere.'

'Well, the short version is I'm helping organize a singles night for some escaped inmates of a mental hospital.'

'That's the short version?'

'Yes.'

'I see.'

‘You do? Oh good, you won’t need the long one then.’

‘Actually, I think I probably do.’

Chris listened as the Doctor explained about his discovery of the injured boy in Soho, about his meeting with Jack Bartlett and their abduction by the 195

monstrous vehicle. Chris interrupted the Doctor when he began to describe his trip to Healey and the Institute.

‘But *I’ve* been there, Doctor. I helped bring back two of your escaped inmates. We were attacked on the way back, but we finally got back to London yesterday.’

‘Well if you’ve been to Healey, then you must know all about the Toys.’

Chris nodded. ‘A little. I only heard a bit about their background from. . .

from Patsy.’

The Doctor looked down from the top of the ladder. ‘What do you make of them? I should very much like to know?’

Chris thought about Patsy. ‘I’m not really sure. They’re. . . difficult. Strange.

Their empathic abilities unnerve me. It’s a little frightening to be around people who always know what sort of mood you’re in.’

‘Yes, I suppose that’s. . . true,’ the Doctor commented. Chris was left with the impression that the Doctor had been expecting a different response from him.

‘Anyway,’ the Doctor continued. ‘We managed to organize a break out and brought all the Toys that were being held at the Institute back here. I’ve agreed to hold a party for them; Tilda’s going to invite all her bohemian friends, see if we can’t get all the Toys bonded at one big party. I thought a masked ball would be most appropriate.’

‘Bonded?’

‘You know – joined. Hitched,’ the Doctor said, enjoying using the collo-quialism. ‘They really are quite remarkable. I’ve never seen such a complex artificial lifeform. Their ability to provide what is

therapeutically needed is quite extraordinary. The human psychiatrist involved in the project, being American, is a humanist but I think even Sigmund would have approved of the Toys. After all, it was Freud who was the first to argue that the therapist ought to be a blank screen in order to receive the patient's projections. Just imagine: all your needs, all your desires, your emotional needs – all met by one person. Moriah doesn't know what he's constructed. The Toys can be much more than therapy, I'm sure of it.'

Chris was finding it hard to follow what the Doctor was saying. 'Constructed? What do you mean, constructed?'

'Well, grown is probably more accurate. I've yet to see the actual process,'

the Doctor remarked, animatedly. 'Although it sounds fascinating.'

'Grown,' Chris repeated, dully.

'In tanks apparently,' the Doctor added, brightly.

Chris turned away from the Doctor; he didn't want his friend to see the expression on his face.

'Christopher, is everything all right?'

'Yes,' Chris lied. A memory of Patsy entered his head. After he had been freed from the cells at the police station, she had appeared while he'd been sitting desolate and hung-over on the steps of Charing Cross Police Station.

Standing with one hand on her hip, squinting with a look of amused disapproval on her face.

That look.

A blank screen on to which he had projected his desire.

The woman he was falling in love with was not an alien hiding from some terrible extraterrestrial persecution, but instead a projection of his innermost desires; a shop window dummy on to which he had transferred his most private needs and fantasies.

Roz.

‘Chris, what’s the matter?’

‘Everything’s fine. Just fine,’ he whimpered and then doubled over. ‘Oh, cruk, I think I’m going to be sick,’ he muttered, covering his mouth with his hand and then sprinting from the room.

The Doctor found Chris a little further down Frith Street. He was bent over in the doorway of an empty shop. The Doctor winced as he heard Chris retching violently. He walked up to Chris and placed the flat of his hand on his back.

‘It’s Patsy, isn’t it?’ he guessed.

Chris nodded, almost imperceptibly.

‘I imagine that this must have come as a bit of a shock.’

Chris made a guttural noise in his throat, somewhere between indignation and vomiting. He wiped the bile from his lips with his shirt cuff and turned to face the Doctor. The expression of anger on Chris’s face was so intense that the Doctor physically recoiled, taking a couple of steps backward.

‘How could you be involved in this? I don’t understand how you can be helping them. What could you be thinking of?’

‘If they don’t have partners they’ll die.’

‘So it’s all right to allow people to be duped into relationships with creatures that are no more than their fantasies. Crukking hell, Doctor, what did you think you were doing?’

‘You don’t understand, Chris. I want to save lives. I don’t have another way of doing this. They can become more than Toys, I know they can. Some of them are already complete individuals. They just need some support and some time to make the transition.’

‘And the end justifies the means does it?’ Chris yelled. ‘It’s all right for people to get lied to along the way?’ He poked the Doctor hard in the chest.

‘Goddess, that’s not a pretty attitude. When I think of Patsy now, I can actually see the other people in her. It’s so crukking obvious now that I know. Forrester, 197

Ishtar, old girlfriends, even little bits of Bernice. But. . . oh shit. . . but

mostly Roz.'

The young Adjudicator pushed past the Doctor and staggered a few steps down the street before coming to a faltering stop and resting his head against the window of a shop. He started to laugh, coldly and without humour. The sound was ugly and made the Doctor tense up inside. At that moment, he would have done anything to make the sound stop.

'I wanted her back so much that I conjured her out of the crukking air.

I turned Patsy into her. Goddess, I feel so. . . ' Chris thumped his forehead against the glass, making the window pane shake in its frame. He scrunched up his face, fighting back tears. 'I feel so. . . so humiliated.'

'I'm sorry. I didn't realize,' the Doctor said helplessly, moving to comfort his friend.

'Don't,' Chris said, firmly. 'Don't you even come near me, do you hear?' His voice was edging towards hysteria. 'I don't want your support, thank you very much. I'm too angry with you for that.' He took a deep breath and, suddenly aware that he was hugging himself tightly, straightened up. 'Can't you see,' he said, screwing up his face again. 'I'm going to have to lose her all over again.

It was hard enough once and now it's going to start all over again. All over a-crukking-gain. Goddess, I'm right back where I started.'

'Surely you don't have to lose her at all.'

Chris's eyes widened in horror. 'Goddess, you actually think I should stay with Patsy, don't you? You actually think I could do that. Could you?'

'I don't. . . you know I don't get involved. Not like that. Not any –'

'Shit,' Chris interrupted, prodding the Doctor hard in the chest. 'You're so messed up, do you know that? I'm going to find Patsy and sort this out.' He gave the Doctor a look of utter contempt and then spat, 'I'll leave you to your heroics.'

The Doctor was left standing outside the dance hall on Frith Street. Alone.

The preparations for the party were almost complete. The sparse,

modern look of Ronnie Scott's – all Formica table tops and vinyl seats – had been transformed with balloons, garlands and streamers. Jack thought the whole place looked like something out of *South Pacific*.

Tilda was busy ordering everyone about. The woman psychiatrist from the hospital was there, as well as Gilliam and Inspector Harris. The Doctor and his friend Christopher were nowhere in sight.

Mikey and Dennis had gone home. Mickey had decided that he didn't want to attend the party. Jack could understand why.

Jack hung back in the doorway, unable to bring himself to enter the room.

Masked and costumed figures lined the edge of the dancefloor. There were 198

harlequins, pirates, princesses, lions. All motionless, like wallflowers just waiting for someone to invite them to dance.

The Doctor walked up behind Jack, looking preoccupied. 'Jack, I need to talk to you. It's about Chris –'

Jack couldn't take his eyes off the costumed figures. 'If I stepped into that party tonight and danced with one of those things, they'd turn into Eddy Stone wouldn't they?'

The Doctor nodded, hesitantly, as if he wasn't certain. 'Maybe.'

'I could bring him back just by going in there, couldn't I? That easy. That's why Eddy's hair changed colour, isn't it? He could somehow sense that I fancied blokes with blond hair just from being with me.'

'Do you want to bring Eddy back?'

'No!' Jack exclaimed. 'I don't know. I want him back more than anything I've ever wanted. But not now. It wouldn't be the same, would it? I'd know he wasn't real, wouldn't I?' Jack shivered. 'I need to get out of here for a bit.

I'm gonna go for a walk.'

Jack turned and ran out of the dancehall. Too wrapped up in his own emotions to see the expression on the Doctor's face.

The Doctor strode on to the empty dancefloor, dug his hands into his trouser pockets, and tried to look nonchalant as he surveyed the circle

of costumed mannequins which surrounded him. He noticed Gilliam sitting on the stage, scrutinizing him. He winced, inwardly.

'Pre-party nerves?' she asked. 'Or are you just at a loose end?'

The Doctor forced a smile. 'Both, I think. I've got just one last thing to do for the party and then I'm done,' the Doctor said, fingering the party invitations which were still in his pocket. 'So,' he began, 'what do you think of the 1950s?'

'Well it makes a change from the deserts of Kr'on Tep. A welcome change.'

The Doctor didn't miss her tone. 'I thought you were happy there. I was told you were in love.'

'Well, you were misinformed. I was so sure that you would return, I made Yr'canos wait on Thoros Beta for a month. And even when we finally left I didn't once stop believing that you would come back. Right up until the day of the wedding I was certain that you would come for me.'

'It wasn't my choice. Please believe me. I was snatched out of time by my own people. Imprisoned. Forced to stand trial. It was a drumhead. If I'd had a choice –'

'You did have a choice. You could have come back afterwards. Isn't that the whole point of being able to travel in time?'

'Yes, yes I probably could have. But by then I'd learnt that you were a Warrior Queen and I was caught up in other battles. Time runs away with 199

itself. It runs away with me.'

'I thought we were friends.'

'We were. We *are*.'

She shook her head. 'That's the trouble with you, isn't it, Doctor? You're so busy trying to deal with the big picture, the big conflict, that you can't see anything else. You can't see what it does to the people around you. Like your friend Christopher or –'

'Why am I the only person who seems to care whether an entire species is given the chance to survive?' the Doctor interrupted,

bitterly. He took his hat off and fiddled with the brim. More quietly, he added, 'I just can't bear the idea of anyone else dying, that's all.'

'I heard that you'd lost someone close to you,' she said, coolly. 'And I think, to be really honest, it's clouding your judgement.' Gilliam gestured around them at the mannequins. 'They're not exactly alive now, are they? They're just possibilities. You can't just expect people to take them on without knowing what they are. You've got to offer people a choice. Look at what the deception has done to Chris and Jack. They're hurting, Doctor. What's the point in bringing this lot to life if it ends up creating so much pain?'

'I. . . don't know,' the Doctor mumbled and turned and hurried from the room.

'You're a human being, aren't you?'

'Is that a trick question, darling?'

The Doctor smiled, uneasily, at Tilda's barman. 'I mean you're not one of Tilda's people? You're not a Toy?'

Andrew gave him a puzzled look. 'Does it make a difference?'

The Doctor exhaled heavily. 'That's the question. Would you sit with me for a moment, I need some company and my friends are all. . . busy.'

Andrew nodded. 'All right. I could do with a ciggie. I've been working flat out all afternoon. Well,' he added, grinning a bit sheepishly, 'for an hour, at least.'

The Doctor found himself smiling. He guessed that Andrew was in his late twenties. The young man wore his hair cropped close to his head, and had light blue eyes that sparkled with good humour.

They sat huddled in their jackets on the cold front steps of Ronnie Scott's watching the Soho evening begin. Every now and then, Andrew would pass comment on the young men that walked past the club. He offered the Doctor a cigarette before lighting his own.

The Doctor shook his head. 'They're terribly bad for you, you know. Cancer, bronchitis, premature hair loss.'

The young man didn't seem to hear.

The Doctor pulled the thick wad of envelopes from his pocket. ‘I’ve still got all these invitations to deliver. I wonder if Tilda’s friends will come.’

‘It’s not much notice, is it?’

‘Oh, time isn’t the problem. Not this time, anyway.’

‘Really?’ The barman said, glancing at his watch. ‘The party’s meant to start in a couple of hours. Mind you, knowing the punters at the Tropics, I should think they’ll all come running once they hear about the free booze.’

The Doctor read the name which had been hurriedly scrawled on the front of the first envelope. Did he really have the right to trick all these people, to lie to them, in order to let another race be born?

‘I need someone to tell me that I’m doing the right thing,’ he murmured out loud.

‘Darling, if you need someone else to tell you that then you already know that it’s not. Otherwise you could tell yourself, couldn’t you?’

The Doctor’s face broke into a toothy smile. He felt as if a weight had been lifted from his shoulders. ‘You’re a wise man, Andrew.’

‘I know,’ the young man agreed. ‘I know.’

Andrew watched the strange little man step back inside the dancehall. He took a drag on his cigarette, and then considered it for a moment before grinding it out beneath his heel.

Premature hair loss? he thought and gingerly patted the back of his head.

‘I just hope that everyone turns up,’ Julia Mannheim said, as the hour of the party approached. ‘We hardly gave any notice.’

‘Don’t worry your little psychological brain, *deah*,’ Tilda laughed, putting up the last of the bunting. ‘I’ve invited all my regulars and told them to bring their mates. And that lot would walk a hundred miles barefoot on broken glass if there was a free drink in it. Besides, the Doctor’s promised to go back in time in that little closet of his and put them in last week’s post.’

‘No one’s coming,’ the Doctor said quietly from beside her.

‘Little Miss Doctor’s an optimist, isn’t she?’

‘I didn’t send the invitations. I’m not going to send them. I can’t.’

A tense silence descended upon the dancehall.

Julia and Harris both

stopped what they were doing and turned to stare at the Doctor.

Tilda climbed slowly down the ladder. ‘Has your time machine blown a gasket or something?’

‘No, the TARDIS is fine. I can’t be party to the duplicity. It isn’t fair. I’m sorry, Tilda, truly.’

Tilda stared at him, a look of total incomprehension on her face. ‘Can’t be party to the duplicity?’ she repeated under her breath, shaking her head.

201

‘Do you know what you are doing?’ she demanded, her voice filled with suppressed anger.

The Doctor nodded. ‘Yes. Finally I do.’

She poked him in the chest with a thin finger. ‘You are sentencing all of my people to death. Don’t you understand, you stupid little man, that without partners my people are nothing. You have condemned each and every one of them to a blank empty nothing. Well, I hope your fancy morals and ethics keep you warm at night.’ Tilda stamped her foot angrily. ‘We’re not like you.

We can’t be whole on our own. We need others. We need people to bond with.’

The Doctor’s eyes narrowed. ‘What about you? Who are you bonded with?’

‘Me?’ Tilda looked at him blankly. The thought had clearly not occurred to her. ‘Frankly, I don’t have the time. I’m too busy looking after this little lot.’

‘So why are you still alive?’

Jack had almost left Ronnie Scott's and gone home several times. Almost.

But he was still hovering in the hallway when the music started. He knew the song – it was an old show tune. His mother used to sing it when she cleaned the house on Sundays. The words were curious, simple but affecting.

A woman politely asking her lover how she could be expected to go on living without him. The sentiment was haunting.

Jack slipped into the back of the dancehall, and stood quietly in the shadows. Patsy was standing on the small stage on the other side of the room, singing. A narrow spotlight picked her out on the stage, isolating her from the band.

She wasn't wearing make-up and her hair, usually carefully coiffured, was tied back in a simple ponytail. Instead of her cocktail dress she was wearing a gentleman's suit, a couple of sizes too large. She looked awful. Her eyes were sunken and the skin on her face seemed loose and bloated. She let the words of the song tumble out with little care for how they fitted to the music.

Jack knew that the Doctor hadn't sent out the invitations. In the end, only about forty people had turned up for Tilda's party. All of them couples: mothers and sons, brothers and sisters, lovers. Jack had no idea how they had known to come here. He wondered if the Toys had some kind of link to each other. Watching them, Jack was a little envious of the sense of community in the air. They didn't look like they had come to a party. They looked like they had made a pilgrimage to some strange, non-canonical church. He recognized several of them from evenings he had spent at the Tropics with Eddy.

He found himself speculating which of the pair was the Toy and which was the human being. They looked lost in the large dancehall, as they stood in pairs behind the statuesque mannequins who lined the edge of the dancefloor.

The dancefloor itself was dark and empty, save for a single spotlight focused on Tilda and a motionless, costumed figure. The chorus of the song began, Jack noticed that Patsy sang these words more confidently or perhaps just with greater feeling:

Not a day

I wouldn't last a single day

Without your tender love

My dear

As the chorus of the song got underway, Tilda began a simple and yet elegant dance around the statue. Occasionally, her hand would lightly caress the still figure as she moved slowly to the rhythm of the music, twisting her body and describing large circles in the air with her hands.

Jack found himself willing the mannequin to respond. Suddenly, he realized the probable result of his thoughts and he hurriedly retreated to the other side of the door to the dancehall.

After what seemed an age, the costumed figure, tentatively, began to respond to Tilda's movements, swaying to the gentle rhythm of the song. After a few minutes, Tilda and the costumed figure were dancing in each other's arms. The song spiralled to a dramatic climax and the two dancers paused, standing facing each other in silence.

Carefully, Tilda removed the straps of the painted mask which the mannequin was wearing, to reveal the face of a beautiful young man. His skin was coal-black and his eyes, large and oval; they shone with intelligence. He reached towards Tilda, slipping his hand around the back of her neck, and pulling her gently towards him. Their kiss was met with a splattering of ap-plause from the other Toys and their friends.

Jack became aware of movement close by him. The Doctor was dabbing at his forehead with his handkerchief. He saw Jack staring at him and smiled, looking visibly relieved by what he had just witnessed take place on the dancefloor.

The torch song was replaced with heady, Latin music, and soon the party was in full swing. The dancefloor full of twisting, twirling figures. Everyone but Jack was dancing in the room. Even the Doctor allowed himself to be pulled on to the dancefloor and shuffled, a little self-consciously next to Tilda.

Jack smiled to himself; it was a relief to know that the Doctor wasn't an expert at everything. All of the newly awakened Toys gave the little man a wide berth. Jack tried to picture what sort of person the Doctor might bring to life, but he couldn't even begin to imagine what they might be like.

Jack watched as the last frozen statue jerked into life and begin to dance, clumsily at first, to the intoxicating rhythms. The last of the Toys come alive.

203

'Goodbye Eddy,' Jack whispered as a chapter of his life closed for ever.

He was about to slip away, when he saw a figure in a Harlequin costume push its way through the crowd on the dancefloor and head straight for him.

Shocked by the costumed figure's determination, Jack backed into the hallway of Ronnie Scott's.

Had he been standing too close to the toys and activated one by accident?

He felt ashamed, exposed, and a little excited as the figure cut a path directly towards him. Could this be Eddy come alive?

What should he do? His first reaction was just to take the masked figure in his arms and let himself be drawn into the rhythm of the dance. He couldn't deny the part of him that, despite knowing what Eddy really was, simply wanted to be with him. He imagined pulling off the Harlequin mask to see Eddy's deep blue eyes shining back at him. His shining eyes and wicked, impish grin.

The Harlequin stood before him. It was carrying something in its hand.

Something metal. At exactly the same time that the masked figure let out a high-pitched giggle, Jack realized that it was carrying a cut-throat razor.

'We've been looking for you, Jack Bartlett,' the Harlequin said.

204

14

London Burning

The Doctor sat on the bar watching the newly made couples dancing in each others' arms. The dancefloor was a riot of noise and colour and laughter.

Tilda's barman, Andrew, handed him a glass of wine. 'Looks like you chose well, darling,' he shouted over the noise of music.

The Doctor looked down at the glass in his hand. He sniffed it, took a small sip and then put it down on the bar. 'I hope so,' he shouted back.

The Doctor became aware of another sound competing with the noise from the stage: a low repetitive thumping sound. Ripples began to appear on the surface of the Doctor's wine. Scanning the room, he was alarmed to see the firedoors rattling on their hinges, before they finally cracked open and collapsed inwards.

A dozen blank-faced creatures charged through the doors into the room wielding their twin-headed metal spears above their heads. The dancefloor emptied in seconds, the music dying away as the band caught sight of the sprinting figures. Costumed dancers screamed in panic as they tried to get away.

The Doctor leapt off the bar and quickly ran over to face the unwelcome guests. He'd been expecting this. Part of him had actually been hoping for it.

Somehow a confrontation with Moriah felt easier to deal with than another fight with young Christopher.

The Doctor wasn't surprised to see the huge figure of Moriah follow the creatures into the room, striding confidently into the centre of the dancefloor.

The Doctor had suspected that Moriah wasn't going to allow the Toys to enjoy new lives outside of his influence.

Moriah's impact on the occupants of the room was dramatic: the Toys scuttled away from him, sheltering behind tables and chairs, while others hurried to the far exits. Only Tilda and the young black man born out of the dance remained standing defiantly where they were.

'I thought I told you to bugger off? It's members only and you're gate-crashing.'

Moriah pointed at her companion. 'What is *that*?' he demanded with obvious disgust.

‘The future, *deah*.’

The Doctor joined Tilda at her side. It’s over, Moriah. Why don’t you just leave.’

The huge man towered over the Doctor. ‘If I cannot have my queen, then no one shall. All these creatures are mine. I created them and I have come here to destroy them.’

‘We are free of you now,’ Tilda told him.

‘Free of me?’ he laughed, without humour. ‘What could you possibly understand of freedom? You are nothing more than the lingering residue of my desire. An animated shell. Nothing more. Even as I stand in front of you, you’re entire being is affected by my will, you cannot help but react to my desire.’

‘You overestimate your appeal, *husband*,’ Tilda snapped. ‘I’m afraid you’re going to have to be responsible for satisfying your desires on your own from now on,’ she quipped, making a rude gesture with her right hand.

A low chuckle spread through the crowd. Tilda bowed slightly, ever the performer.

The Doctor watched as Moriah closed his eyes and frowned in concentration. The Doctor felt the impact of the huge man’s efforts, as his empathic instructions washed through the room, attempting to influence the Toys.

Moriah opened his eyes, only to see Tilda standing in front of him, tapping her foot impatiently. ‘I think you’ll find it’s a little late for that, *deah*. We’re far beyond your reach now.’ She narrowed her eyes. ‘In fact, I wonder. . . ’ Her voice trailed away and she closed her eyes.

The Doctor felt a new sensation in the room; a powerful warm emotion rising up around him. He struggled for words to describe it as he glanced around at the costumed people in the room. Following Tilda’s example, every Toy in the room had closed their eyes, a look of deep concentration on all their faces. The room fell into silence.

It was their sense of belonging the Doctor felt. Trust, comradeship and the quiet love of siblings. It was being transmitted from and between each of the Toys, filling the room with their experience of adversity and their new bonds of friendship and community.

A sharp clattering sound startled the Doctor. He looked around to see the mannequins Moriah had brought with him let their spears fall to the floor.

Distracted by the powerful emotions of the Toys, their link to Moriah's will was interrupted and they became disorientated and sluggish, moving with the graceless uncertainty of drunks.

'Stop it! Stop it immediately!' Moriah roared. 'How are you doing this? It is impossible!'

* * *

206

Gordy heard the voice of his devil screaming in rage just as Carl bundled Jack Bartlett into the back of the Rover. For a moment, he thought that the voice was coming from inside his head. And for a terrifying second he wondered if he were completely mad, but then he heard a woman shouting in response to the devil's screams and he knew the voice was real.

Gordy looked back at the dancehall. Could it be that his devil had come?

Had he crawled up out of the depths of Hell itself? Gordy had planned to kill all of his devil's enemies to win back his approval, but if instead he could help his devil now, surely then he would be grateful and would forgive him his moment of cowardice at the club?

'Keep Bartlett here,' Gordy shouted to Carl as he leapt out of the car. 'I'll be back in a minute.'

The voices were coming from the dancehall. Gordy ran into the room expectantly and then slowed to a halt when he didn't see his devil. He looked about uncertainly, searching for him, but there was only the Doctor, some skinny woman and a big grey bloke in a suit.

'What's going on?' Gordy demanded. 'Where is he? I heard him, I heard my devil. Where is he?'

The Doctor laughed. He was laughing at *him*. 'Hello, Gordon. This is turning out to be quite a reunion. There's someone here I think you might be interested in meeting.'

Gordy felt a red haze of anger descend upon him. He hated the

Doctor.

Hated the way he looked at Gordy, as if he wasn't anything special. He hated the way the Doctor wasn't scared when he threatened him, and just looked back at Gordy with pity on his face.

'Come in Gordon, let me introduce you.' The Doctor indicated the bulky man with his hand. 'Gordon, this is the Prince of Darkness. Prince of Darkness, this is your willing but misguided slave, Gordon Scraton.'

'That's not the devil. Where is he? I heard his voice.'

The man in the grey suit was boiling with rage and ignored Gordy completely. 'This is your doing, Doctor? You have perverted my work. You have altered the mannequins somehow so they have betrayed me.'

'Actually, Moriah,' the Doctor informed him, 'they did it all on their own.

You should be proud – you've created new life in the Universe.'

Gordy stared at the large man in the grey suit. He had no idea what they were talking about, but that voice was unmistakable. It was him! The large man in the grey suit was his devil. Gordy blinked. Where were his horns? His scarlet face? He didn't look like the devil at all. Perhaps he was disguised?

Perhaps he had to make himself look like a man when he walked abroad amongst the unsuspecting people of the world?

207

'It's me,' Gordy said. 'It's Gordy. I need to talk to you. I need you to understand what happened.'

The grey man glanced at him, frowning at the distraction for a moment, before turning back to the Doctor. The 'devil' might just as well have punched Gordy in the guts. Gordy had seen that look before, all too many times, on his older brother's face. Albert had never had the time to pay any attention to him. Never listened to his ideas for scams for the firm. Never let him in on any of the jobs. Gordy had always been an irritation to Albert. An embarrassment.

'Don't turn away when I'm talking to you!' Gordy had wanted it to

sound like a threat, but somehow it came out as a plea. ‘I need to explain. I need you to understand.’

The grey-suited man’s eyes flickered in Gordy’s direction. ‘What can you do for me? You’re useless. A coward. I have no further use for you. Leave me.’

‘No! You can’t mean that!’

Something in Moriah snapped. He strode over to Gordy, picked him up in his huge hands. For a second Gordy could see his large grey eyes close up, eyes that were filled with contempt. And then Moriah threw him across the room, and his body smashed through the fire exit and crumpled in a heap in the alleyway.

‘That was uncalled for!’ the Doctor cried out, as he watched Gordy Scraton slump to the ground outside the club.

Moriah whirled round to face the Doctor. ‘Really? And exactly when did your opinion start to count for anything?’

‘Ever since I started getting in your way, at a guess,’ the Doctor said, brightly.

‘Otherwise, you’d still be ignoring me.’

Moriah towered over the Doctor. ‘I warn you Doctor, you are being extremely foolish. If you really cared about the people of this city you would allow me to collect my –’

‘Toys?’ The Doctor quipped. ‘That about sums you up, doesn’t it? You are really a very spoilt child, Moriah. Don’t you understand, your Toys have outgrown you.’

‘Doctor, I have no quarrel with the people of this world. Not yet.’

The Doctor was genuinely surprised by this remark. ‘No quarrel! And what do you call kidnap and murder? Your homicidal taxi cab hasn’t exactly been proffering the hand of friendship, has it?’

Moriah waved away this accusation. ‘The device brought me a few dozen people. No more than that.’

The Doctor closed his eyes for a moment. ‘Can’t you hear what you are saying?’ he asked, eventually.

Moriah ignored the remark. ‘You know, I should be grateful to you, Doctor.

After all, it was your companion who led me to Earth in the first place.’

‘What?’ The Doctor was aghast. ‘What do you mean?’

‘I had travelled the Galaxy searching for appropriate material for my work.

After every fruitless quest I would return to the chamber beneath Petruska’s palace on Kr’on Tep to begin my search a fresh. On occasion, I walked amongst my people on the surface of the planet, even though I could never announce my presence.’

The Doctor snorted. ‘Yes, they might have asked you some rather difficult questions.’

‘When I heard that my descendent, Yr’canos, had brought back a human female from Earth to be his queen, I set the gateway for this world.’

The Doctor ran his hands through his hair, feeling the heavy weight of responsibility settle upon him. Every decision, every event created ripples in the Universe. The ripples could merge, rebound off the infinite dimensions of time and space in unforeseeable ways. But why did so many of them have to lead directly back to *his* actions!

‘Don’t you see, Moriah? You only make me more determined to stop you. I cannot allow you to continue to trample on these people.’

‘If you do not return the Toys to me, I will unleash more of the gelatinous devices upon this city. Return the Toys to me. They are mine by right.’

‘No, Moriah, you lost the right to the Toys a long time ago.’

‘It is your choice, Doctor. Return the Toys to me or this city will become the site of my revenge.’ Moriah stared at Tilda for a moment before turning on his heel and striding out of the dancehall.

‘Stay in the car!’ Carl ordered Jack, as he clambered out to help Gordy. Jack immediately tried to escape, only to find the back doors of the Rover were locked and wouldn’t open. He started to climb over the front seat, but Carl pushed him back over as he returned, dragging

a raving Gordy behind him.

Jack looked at Gordy Scraton in horror. The man had completely lost his marbles. He sat in the passenger seat, his eyes wild and unseeing. He was clenching and unclenching his fists in his lap and muttered constantly under his breath. 'I'll show 'em,' Gordy murmured. 'I'll show 'em all, oh yeah. I'll get that little bastard. I'll kill him, just like I promised.'

'I would've got the kid before,' Carl said as the car pulled away, sounding worried that this might all turn out to be all his fault. 'I would've, but Eddy Stone stuck his nose in, so I 'ad to do 'im instead.'

'You dirty stinking bastard,' Jack raged. Not caring that Carl was driving, he started to pummel the back of the thugs head. 'I'll kill you, do you hear?

I'll kill you!'

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'Hey, get off me you stupid little –' The car swerved wildly before Carl brought it to a shrieking halt, the force knocking Jack forward and then back into his seat.

By the time Jack had recovered, Carl was leaning over the seat, his arm pulled back, readying a punch. Jack didn't even have time to raise his arms to protect his face.

Everything went black.

As they turned into Silchester Road, Dennis ran ahead of Mikey preparing to scamper up the fire escape so Mrs Carroway wouldn't see him. Mikey followed his little brother's progress with his eyes. The streets in Notting Hill were dangerous. If it wasn't the drunks hassling you for beer money, then it was bored Teds looking for a bit of aggravation to liven up their day.

Mrs Carroway must have been listening for the sound of his key because she opened her door and waylaid him as he tried to slip across the downstairs hall.

'Oh, it's you,' she muttered, looking disappointed.

He only nodded a greeting in reply. She never seemed to demand anymore from him.

‘If you see that Jack Bartlett, you can tell him that he’s gonna be out on his ear if he don’t come up with his rent by tomorrow.’

Mikey just shrugged and took the steps two at a time.

‘I mean it,’ she shouted after him. ‘I’ve been too easy on you two. You’re taking me for a ride.’

As Mikey entered their room he saw that Jack was lying, motionless, face down in the middle of the room. The window was open, but Dennis wasn’t in sight. Mikey hauled Jack over; one of his eyes was bleeding and he wasn’t making any sense, but he was breathing.

Someone started screaming outside. A young, high voice.

Dennis!

Mikey let Jack fall back to the floor and hurtled out of the window and down the fire escape. Below him on the street, Carl Scraton had got hold of Dennis’s collar and was struggling with him, razor in hand. Dennis was kicking and screaming: doing anything which might loosen the thug’s grip on him.

Mikey had never run so fast, taking the steps of the fire escape three at a time, but he knew he wasn’t going to make it to them before Carl got a chance to use his knife. He reached the last step of the fire escape and sprinted towards them just as Carl tucked his blade under Dennis’s chin.

It was too late.

Suddenly, Carl Scraton was jerked backwards. Two heavy-set black men in builder’s overalls had stepped on to the pavement from between a car and a van and witnessed what Scraton had been about to do. They pulled him off the boy, looking at him not with fear or rage, but with complete and utter disbelief and surprise.

‘What did you think. . . ’ One of them started to say, shaking his head.

The other had pulled Carl’s razor out of his grip and was staring at it in total astonishment.

The first man’s surprise was beginning to turn to anger. ‘A boy? He’s just a boy. What kind of –’

Carl Scraton was standing between them, looking shaken, unsure whether to run or fight.

Mikey hit him with all the force he could summon, pushing him on to the floor and screaming a string of curses at him. Some cool, quiet part of his mind decided then and there to kill Carl Scraton. It was the only way he was going to be able to make sure that Dennis would be safe. Safe for ever.

Mikey wasn't aware of the two men trying to pull him off Carl, or off the Teds who, on seeing what looked like a lone white man being set upon by three blacks, decided to join in. All Mikey could see was Carl Scraton's face alive with fear and pain as he hit him and hit him and hit him again.

And from those tiny moments in the shadow a battered van on Silchester Road in Notting Hill, the violence started to spread. Tensions which had been smouldering since the riots in the summer were ignited like dry newspaper under a magnifying glass. Cars were overturned and set alight. Windows smashed and shops looted. By midnight, the number of people injured would be up in the hundreds. Several of them wouldn't ever recover from their injuries.

Jack awoke on the floor of his room. His head ached terribly and his vision was blurred in one eye. Orange light flickered into the room from the window.

Outside, Silchester Road was ablaze. Everyone who lived in the area appeared to be out on the streets. Some were fighting, although most were just standing around waiting for something exciting to happen. A few kids were throwing bricks at the houses across the street. Hardly any of the windows in the street had any glass left in their frames to break. A bunch of Teds were wrecking a car; a few of them stood on its roof, leaping up and down gleefully, while others kicked its doors in.

Further down the street an old white woman was trying to protect two Sikh kids who had taken shelter in her front yard from an angry gang of whites.

The small crowd shouted filthy curses at the boys and chanted, 'Bring 'em 211

out' and 'Lynch 'em'. The old woman was yelling at the mob, 'Go home! You should be bloody ashamed of yourselves!'

Leaning out of his window, Jack felt as if he were watching a Pathe newsreel at the cinema; it didn't feel as if it were really happening at all. And then he saw two figures on the streets and he knew it was real. He swung his legs over the windowsill and hurried down the fire escape to where Mikey and Dennis stood on the edge of a crowd of West Indians, Sikhs and older whites.

Mikey saw him coming and gave a grim smile of welcome. 'Your eye looks bad, Jack Bartlett.'

'What? Oh yeah, I know. Feels worse than it looks. What happened to the Scratons?'

Mikey led him over to a van, which had lost all of its windows. In its shadow lay Carl Scraton's corpse.

'Blimey,' Jack swore. He only recognized the body by its clothes. The face of Carl Scraton's corpse was entirely featureless. Just blank flesh where eyes, nose and a mouth had once been.

'I killed him,' Mikey said, in a flat voice. 'And I'm not sorry. At least now Dennis is safe. We all are.'

Somewhere in the distance a police siren began to wail. The Teds who were smashing up the car, dropped their makeshift weapons and started to scatter.

'No,' Jack said. 'Not yet, we're not.'

The news of the riot spread through the city: smaller disturbances sparking off in other parts of the capital. Gordy listened to the reports on the radio as he drove back to Soho, scared and alone. He felt ashamed and guilt-ridden for having abandoned Carl, but when some Teds had started to kick the doors of the Rover he had, automatically, put his foot down and accelerated out of Notting Hill.

He had abandoned his brother.

People were already on the streets of the West End. The air was thick with the expectation of violence. Gordy was forced to slow to a crawl as he drove down Wardour Street, the crowds thickening as he neared the centre of Soho.

His gang were still at the nightclub when he got back, edgy and excited by the prospect of a riot. Gordy was relieved that the devil hadn't taken back his men. Afraid that they might ask him what had

happened to Carl, he ordered them out on to the streets.

I'll show them, Gordy muttered to himself as he loaded his father's service revolver. He led his men on a tour of destruction through Soho: he watched them as they threw flaming, petrol-filled milk bottles into the queer pub on Old Compton Street; cheered them on as they threw bricks through the win-212

dows of the Jewish-owned shops; and laughed as they ran riot through a Chinese laundry, chasing the petrified young women out on to the street.

Chief Inspector Harris tried to force his way down the centre of Brewer Street.

The streets were packed and in chaos, reverberating with the sound of breaking glass and shouts of fear and delight.

A young man ran up to him, eyes wide with shock and blood streaming down his face, a rounded shard of brown glass protruding from his cheek.

Some bastard had pushed a beer bottle into his face. Harris tried to calm him down and sat him in the doorway of a shop.

There was a police box up ahead, Harris hurried towards it. If he could get through to Charing Cross then he could call for reinforcements and an ambulance. The plaque with its reassuring message was ajar, he pulled the little door open and reached for the receiver inside.

It wasn't there. Someone had ripped it out of its socket; the cord hung limply down the side of the box. With mounting frustration, Harris tried to slam the little door shut, but the cord prevented it from closing properly and he was denied even that small satisfaction.

Damn. There probably wasn't much point anyway as all of the available cars would have been sent to Notting Hill. Cursing, he made his way back to the injured boy.

15

Whatever Happens, I Love You

The Doctor stood at the window of the Tropics looking down on the activity on the streets; the lights from the fires below flickered over his stern expression.

Gilliam joined him just as three young men ran down the street, yelling gleefully, one of them brandished a burning torch.

'What are you going to do?' she asked.

'About this? Nothing. It's just the pages of history turning.'

'And Moriah?'

'Ah, yes, Moriah. What do you think should be done?'

She turned and leant against the windowsill. The Doctor continued to stare at the chaos beyond her. 'He won't stop,' she said. 'He's spent thousands of years building up to this moment. He's not going to let it go now, not without a fight.'

The Doctor nodded. 'He's not going to let the Toys have what he has been denied.'

'He'll be back?'

'Oh yes, you can count on that. I don't think he makes idle threats, do you?'

'Then he must be stopped, before he kills anyone else.'

'I agree. Are you volunteering for the job?'

She'd been expecting this question. 'I'll come with you if you need me.'

'And would you kill him?'

'What?' Gilliam looked away for a moment. 'I. . . I don't know. Will it come to that?'

'After what happened this afternoon, everyone is assuming that I'll lead an attack on the Institute. Rally the troops. Start a small war. You know, the usual boys' stuff.'

'And will you?'

The Doctor sighed and hooked his umbrella handle on to his top

pocket.

‘People will get hurt. And I include Moriah in that.’

‘It sounds like a difficult decision.’

The Doctor shook his head. ‘Oh, not at all. Not for me. Not anymore.

Deciding that you won’t use violence to solve your problems is relatively easy.

It’s working out a viable alternative that’s the tricky bit.’

‘And have you got an alternative, a better idea?’

‘Oh yes,’ the Doctor smiled, looking down at the chaos on the street. ‘There are always better ideas than fighting.’

At that moment, Tilda’s barmen entered the room, dragging one of Moriah’s inert mannequins between them. It was still dressed in its orderly’s uniform.

Andrew and Saeed looked expectantly at the Doctor. ‘Where do you want it?’

they asked in unison.

‘Anywhere on the floor will be fine.’ The Doctor tipped his hat in thanks and turned back to Gilliam. ‘What would be the simplest way to get rid of Moriah?’

To kill him? Gilliam thought, but she didn’t give voice to her opinion.

‘Why not give him what he really wants? Why not give him his queen?

Wouldn’t he be a happy little maniac then?’ she said. ‘Can you do that?’

‘Perhaps. Or at least the illusion of her for a little while. But I’ll need your help.’

‘Doctor, I said I’d come with you.’

‘I don’t need a companion for this trip,’ the Doctor said, waving away

the idea with his hand. ‘In fact, I won’t be able to afford the distraction. No, I need your knowledge of Petruska. I need your memories.’

Chris had spent the evening searching Soho for Patsy. He’d tried the bookshop, the Tropics and the restaurant where they’d eaten earlier that day, but Patsy wasn’t at any of these places. As he trudged the streets, he realized that he had no idea what he was going to say if he did find her. He’d been so preoccupied with his thoughts that he’d barely been aware of the tension building on the streets of the West End. When the fighting had broken out, he’d sheltered in a launderette with a few other shocked Sohoites.

Chris was making his way back to the TARDIS when he finally found her.

If it hadn’t been for the photograph outside the Top Ten Club he would never have thought to look for her there.

She had top billing. Her name spelt out in large glittering letters. The picture had obviously been taken when her husband was still alive. She looked alluring, but vacant. Presumably just how Robert Burgess had wanted her.

The foyer of the club looked dark and deserted through the window, but the front door was slightly ajar. Taking a final glance at the empty eyes staring out of the photograph, Chris slipped inside.

The Doctor, Tilda and Gilliam sat in a triangle around the blank-faced mannequin on the floor of the Tropics. The Doctor sat behind its head, the two women on either side of the creature. The solemnity of the occasion made 216

Gilliam want to giggle, just as she always had when girlfriends had staged seances at High School.

The Doctor reached over to Tilda and rested the fingers of one hand on her forehead. Tilda closed her eyes and a look of quiet enchantment crossed her face.

‘Oh!’ she breathed, opening her eyes a moment later, and smiling a little sheepishly. ‘Oh, I say.’

It was the first time Gilliam had ever seen the woman at a loss for words.

The Doctor's eyes remained closed. He cupped the mannequin's head in his hands, his brow creased in concentration.

And then the features of a young woman began to form on the empty face, pushing their way up through the flat surface of flesh. The woman the mannequin became was recognizably Tilda, only younger and more serene, lacking the worry lines of a mother. She was a fairy tale princess. A sleeping beauty.

Petruska.

The Doctor reached out his hand towards Gilliam to repeat the exercise.

However, he hesitated when he saw her anxious expression. 'It's your choice,'

the Doctor reminded her.

The idea of anyone – particularly the Doctor – having access to her thoughts scared Gilliam. 'I don't know if I trust you anymore, Doctor,' she whispered.

'I've been angry with you for so long now.'

The expression on his face was as expressionless as a mask but, somehow, perhaps precisely because of its stillness, Gilliam knew that he'd been really hurt by her words. He started to move, preparing to climb to his feet. 'I understand. But there's no longer enough of Petruska remaining in Tilda for this to work without you. We need to think of another way.

It wasn't a trick. He was genuinely willing to make a new plan to defeat Moriah rather than compromise her feelings.

'Wait.' Gilliam reached out and grasped his hand, quickly bringing it to her forehead. Instantly, she felt his presence enter her mind, felt his surprise at her change of heart. And then he calmed, and slowly, delicately probed at her memories. She felt him hesitate when he encountered the bitterness she still felt towards him, and his shame when he glimpsed the isolation of the royal life to which he had abandoned her. He lingered for a moment over her achievements as a ruler, commenting on her wisdom and fairness – and Gilliam felt a quiet rush of pride – before he moved on to focus upon her discoveries of the last few days.

Looking through her eyes, he saw the hieroglyphs on the walls of Petruska's chamber. She felt him, almost idly, give voice to the song the hieroglyphs contained even as he translated the meaning secreted beneath. Petruska's 217

voice came to life with an individuality and clarity which Gilliam had never before heard. It wasn't that her own translations were wrong, but they were crude; she'd missed the subtleties of Petruska's language.

She felt Petruska's defiance and anger more keenly than ever before. The frustration of a brilliant woman, a scientist and a thinker, trapped in a prison of boredom and terror. Gilliam felt Petruska's pain when she learnt of her bodyguard's betrayal. Petruska had loved Tol' gar, but more precious than even this, he had been her only independent link to the outside world. A link which had turned out to be only another string of the web Moriah had spun around her. Gilliam felt Petruska's decision to end her life and her eyes flooded with tears. The calmness and maturity with which she faced her final, terrible choice left Gilliam awe-struck.

And then the Doctor released his hand and suddenly, she was back in the Tropics, blinking through her shock.

'We remember you, Petruska, First Queen of Kr'on Tep,' the Doctor whispered, as he placed his hands around the Petruska mannequin's head and transferred the memories to the woman lying motionless on the floor.

She was standing in shadow on a small stage above the auditorium of the Top Ten Club, hugging a bottle of what looked like spirits. She was singing softly, wordlessly to herself, reminding Chris of a distressed child.

Chris paused at the back of the club, before walking across the empty dancefloor to the foot of the stage, his shoes sounding loudly on the polished wooden floor. He looked up at the woman on the stage. There were dark rings under her eyes; she didn't meet his gaze.

'Patsy?' he said, even though he knew that it was her.

She took a swig from the bottle. 'I don't feel very well,' she slurred. 'There's an emptiness inside of me. A hollowness.'

Chris swallowed, painfully.

‘I’m beginning to die, aren’t I? You don’t want me, so I am going to die.’

‘I wish I could help you –’ he began.

‘That’s ironic because I was made to help, Christopher. That’s. . . that’s what I’m for: therapy.’

Chris’s frustration surfaced. ‘Well it’s crukking *bad* therapy, Patsy. This isn’t living it’s like. . . oh I don’t know, it’s too easy being in love with you.’

‘You’re in love with me?’ She blurted out, taking a step nearer the edge of the stage, and the hope in her voice made Chris wince.

‘What? No! I don’t know. How could I be in love with you? You’re just the memory of a friend.’

‘I have no memory. It’s like looking into the mirror and seeing nothing but the mirror. Since you’ve gone I’ve lost sight of who I am. I only remember 218

myself in little glimpses.’

‘I didn’t ask for this, Patsy.’

‘And I did, I suppose?’ her voice flaring with anger, echoing in the empty hall. ‘Did I ask to be born? Did I?’

‘You lied to me, deceived me with that story of being a refugee, of coming from another planet. Goddess, I can’t believe I fell for that.’

Patsy smiled for the first time. ‘You wanted to play the intergalactic hero.

So I let you. You lied to me too. You never told me about. . . about her.’

‘Thank the Goddess!’ he exclaimed.

‘Who was she, Christopher? Who am I?’

Chris looked up at the tragic figure above him on the stage. There was little of Roz Forrester in her now. ‘She was my partner. My friend.’ He paused, before adding, ‘She died.’

Patsy nodded to herself as if this information helped her make sense of

something inside her.

‘When I was with you, it felt so comfortable. I could almost cope with Roz being gone because you were so like her, even though I never really noticed.

I don’t think I wanted to notice. But I know the truth now. Patsy. . . couldn’t you. . . well. . . couldn’t you meet someone else?’

‘I don’t want anyone else. It’s too late for that. I only want you. I was born when you met me. I died when you left me. I lived for a few hours while you loved me. That’s all, Christopher. That’s all.’

Gilliam watched as the Doctor asked Tilda if he could borrow her car.

‘I can’t risk taking Petruska into the TARDIS. Who knows what dreams and needs the old thing might project on to her.’ The Doctor shivered to himself.

‘I don’t think I’m ready to face that.’

Reluctantly, Tilda handed over the keys. ‘That car is my pride and joy. If anything should happen to it –’

‘Don’t worry, I shall treat it as if it were one of my own.’

An image of the Doctor proudly polishing the paint-work on Sunday afternoons popped into Gilliam’s head. Somehow the idea of the Doctor owning something as mundane as a car seemed so absurd. She tried to imagine what sort of vehicle the Doctor, might drive. It wasn’t easy. ‘I didn’t know you owned a car,’ Gilliam said, hoping it wasn’t some obvious penis extension like a Porche.

The Doctor grinned, and as if reading her thoughts said: ‘It’s a vintage model, but it doesn’t go often.’

She laughed. ‘That sounds about right. Are you sure you don’t need some company for this trip?’

The Doctor shook his head vigorously. ‘No, no. I can’t afford any distractions. None at all.’ He indicated the Petruska mannequin which stood patiently by the exit of the Tropics, still dressed in the white tunic of a hospital orderly. ‘I’m going to have to be in constant empathic contact with Nurse Petruska here. It’s going to be quite an

effort to allow Petruska to love Moriah. Any interruption will allow Moriah's unconscious guilt to tip the balance and turn her against him. He's been his own worst enemy throughout his work to recreate his wife. On some level he must want her to reject him, so she does. I imagine that somewhere deep inside of himself he believes that he deserves her hatred.'

'Well he does,' Gilliam said, with feeling. 'What will you do even if he does accept your copy of her?'

'Try and persuade him to use the gateway to leave Earth. Send him somewhere where he won't cause anyone any more trouble.'

'Not back home to Kr'on Tep, then?'

'Oh no. I think that Yr'canos can probably do without Moriah returning and trying to reclaim his throne, don't you?'

Gilliam didn't say anything. She watched as the Doctor led Moriah's bride down the back staircase of the Tropics to begin his mission, just as his young friend Jack staggered in through the front door. His left eye was swollen a painful shade of purple. His face was full of panic and concern.

'What's going on?' he demanded, looking at Tilda. 'Have you seen the Doctor?' He caught sight of the Doctor and his companion leaving and headed over to them. 'Wait!'

Gilliam intercepted him. 'Hang on, Jack. The Doctor's busy. What's going on?'

Jack was looking past her at the Doctor's disappearing back. 'I ran into the Scratons. Gordy was after Dennis – said he was gonna kill him. Notting Hill's in pieces. It's chaos. Worse than around here.' Jack hurried through his explanations, eager to follow the Doctor. 'Where's he off to?'

'He's taking Tilda's car to Healey. To the Institute.'

'What? He's gonna fight Moriah?' Jack stared at Gilliam, his face contorted into a sneer. 'And you let him go on his own? What kind of a friend are you?'

'It's not like that. This is the way the Doctor wanted it. He's got a plan.'

‘And you believed him? He was just trying to keep you out of danger. Make it easy for you to back out of going with him. What a coward! No wonder he dumped you before.’

The nerve he touched was too raw. Gilliam had spent too many nights tossing and turning under the desert sky wondering what she had done to make the Doctor abandon her without a word. She’d slapped the youth across the side of his face before she’d realized that she was angry with him.

220

Jack gave a little yelp – Gilliam winced – she’d caught his injured eye.

‘Christ, Jack, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to –’

His already puffy eye began to bleed, a thick red tear rolling down his cheek.

He wiped away the tear, looking shocked when he glimpsed the red stain on the back of his hand.

He backed away from her, breathing in short, shallow gasps. ‘You’re worse than. . . than the Scratons, or even Moriah. At least I know which side they’re on.’

‘Jack. . . ’ Gilliam started, wanting to make him understand, but the youth had already turned and stumbled out of the Tropics.

The Doctor reappeared at the back of the club a moment later and looked between Tilda and Gilliam. ‘I heard shouting. I thought it was Jack’s voice. Is everything all right?’

‘You just missed him. He’s upset that –’ Gilliam glanced quickly at Tilda, suddenly unsure whether she really was backing out of helping the Doctor.

‘A bit of teenage angst, nothing to worry about,’ Tilda interrupted. ‘Poor kid was worried about you. You know what teenagers are like.’

‘Not really,’ the Doctor said, frowning. ‘I’ll speak to him later,’ he muttered, as if he were adding the task to a long list of chores, and then he ducked back down the stairs.

Tilda and Gilliam exchanged glances.

Chris sat on the edge of the stage of the Top Ten Club. Patsy lay on

her back, her head resting on his lap. They'd sat like that for what felt like hours, him gently stroking her hair, trying to think of words of comfort. Part of him wanted to leave, find the Doctor; but the terrible consequence of walking out on her kept him there. He felt utterly trapped.

'You're going to continue travelling with the Doctor, aren't you?' Patsy asked suddenly.

He'd forgotten about her ability to know what he was feeling.

'I don't know.' Even as he formed the words he knew that he had already made his decision. He didn't belong here and despite his earlier anger with the Doctor, he wasn't ready to leave him just yet.

'I see,' Patsy said sitting up. She swung her legs over the edge of the darkened stage and lowered herself into the auditorium. 'No point in me hanging around prolonging the inevitable,' she said, and walked out of the club.

Feeling like a murderer, Chris hurried after her.

The Doctor accelerated down a pitch-black country lane, navigating partly from memory and mostly by instinct. As the sports car rattled over a cattle grid he thought he heard a muffled voice cry out. He glanced at the silent 221

woman in the passenger seat; her face was still, her eyes fixed on some distant point in front of them.

Shaking his head in puzzlement, he returned his attention to the road.

A small white sign declared that it was fifteen miles to Healey.

By the time Chris stepped back on to the street, Patsy had disappeared. While they had been in the Top Ten Club, a thick smog had descended, coating the streets, and filling the air with its heavy, oppressive atmosphere. He heard the sound of a window smash a little way off and heard male voices shouting something unintelligible and triumphant.

He had no idea which direction Patsy had taken. The smog had reduced visibility to only a dozen metres. Damn! He shouldn't have let her storm off like that. There was no telling what could happen to her in the state she was in. No telling what she might do to herself. Feeling crippled with responsibility, Chris chose a direction at random

and headed off. He'd only covered a few metres when he heard a woman's voice cry out.

Patsy! It was hard to ascertain which direction her cry had come from.

Trying to convince himself that he wasn't just guessing, he turned on his heel and started to run in the opposite direction.

It was after midnight, when Inspector Harris left the Middlesex Hospital. The casualty department was like something out of the war. It had been a long time since he'd seen the wounded have to wait to receive treatment.

He'd stayed with the injured boy he'd found in the riots until a nurse had come to dress the wounds on the lad's face.

There was still the sound of fighting coming from the nearby streets, but Harris didn't have the energy or the stomach to deal with any more violence.

Without knowing why, he made his way to the Tropics.

The club was silent, but the door wasn't locked so he let himself in, noticing as he did so that his hands were shaking. The cold?

There was a handful of people sitting quietly on the sofas, cradling drinks.

A heavy silence filled the room. Harris was reminded of the underground shelters during the war. Tilda looked up from the bar when she saw the door open.

'Oh it's you,' she said. Not the warmest welcome he'd ever received. 'How's our Lil then?'

The middle-aged policeman opened his mouth, intending to complain yet again about her disrespectful language, and took himself completely by surprise by bursting into tears.

Tilda's harsh expression melted. She poured out two glasses of whisky. 'You and me both, *deah*.'

* * *

222

'Keep back!'

Chris skidded to a halt after he charged out of the smog and almost fell upon Patsy and her attacker. The man was slightly built, with close-cropped hair and a smart black suit, but his eyes were full of wildness and terror.

'Keep back,' he warned Chris again, spittle collecting in the corners of his mouth. He ran the end of the gun down Patsy's cheek in a parody of tender-ness. 'This is my town, do you understand?' he told her. 'It don't belong to you and your weirdo friends. It's mine.'

'I understand that,' Chris nodded, adopting the conciliatory tone he'd used to negotiate many hostage situations. 'This is your town,' he repeated. 'All yours.'

'You're one of them,' the gun-man told Patsy. 'I saw you singing at that club when my devil came.'

Oh Goddess, Chris thought, this man's completely psychotic. How on Earth was he going to handle this? How on Earth was he going to handle this on his own?

'I'll show them I can use a gun. I'll show all of them. Prove it to the whole frigging world. The devil said that Gordy Scraton's a coward but I ain't. Oh no.'

Chris took a small step forward, trying to maintain eye contact with the man, who'd begun to drool. 'Gordy? Is that your name?' It was familiar. The Doctor's account had told of a criminal working for people who'd created the Toys. What the hell had they run into?

'I know that you're not a coward. Gordy,' he said, mustering all the sincerity he could. 'You don't need to prove that to me. I know that. Everyone knows that. Give me the gun, then you can tell me all about it, hey?'

The whole point of flattering an armed suspect was to disarm them – literally as well as figuratively. While Chris would be trying to reassure and charm the suspect, Roz would be stalking him from behind. Well, Roz wasn't there and Chris had no idea how to get the gun out of the attacker's hand before he used it on Patsy.

'Oh no,' Gordy said, almost apologetically. 'I can't do that. I've got to show everyone. Albert, my devil, the Doctor. Got to show 'em all.'

Chris measured the distance between them. There was no way that he was going to reach them before the man, Gordy, fired. At the

Academy, cadets were taught that, as a last resort, the only way for a weaponless officer to tackle an armed man head on was by a Diving, Rolling Breakfall with Kick.

It was always taught as a last resort because even the instructors said that it never worked. It involved throwing yourself forward and down, hands out-stretched, curling into a forward roll staying down to take out the attacker's leg with a sharp kick to the kneecap. There were less energetic ways of com-223

mitting suicide. Chris wasn't about to try it while the gun was pointing at Patsy.

He watched Gordy's trigger-finger start to squeeze.

'You're such a cowardly little shit, Gordy,' Chris yelled suddenly. 'You'd shoot a woman, but you'd never dare try and take on someone your own size. Put the gun down, you're not responsible enough to have one.'

For a terrible second there was silence and Chris suddenly knew exactly what it must feel like to be the Doctor. What it felt like to gamble with other people's lives. It was the most terrifying thing in the world.

'Oh yeah?' Gordy said and pointed the gun straight at him. Chris smiled, as if it was an act of great generosity.

He whispered a prayer and leapt forward at the same instant as there was an ear-splitting explosion and the whole world slid sickenly into slow motion.

The Doctor drove the MG through the locked gates of the Petruska Institute at a casual seventy miles an hour. The impact knocked out one of the headlamps and sent the little car spinning off the driveway and into a long uncontrolled skid across the wet lawn. The scarlet sports car carved a long dark groove in the grass as it careered to a halt, narrowly missing a tree.

The shock of the accident disturbed the Doctor's delicate empathic connection to Petruska, and she began to wake, startled to find herself in the middle of an accident. 'What happened?' she slurred, taking in her surroundings through sleepy eyes.

'Small accident. The road curved but I didn't,' the Doctor muttered. 'Nothing to worry yourself about, your Highness.'

The Doctor inspected the damage to the little car. The whole front was crumpled, making the car appear as if it were wrinkling up its nose in distaste.

The Doctor exhaled heavily; Tilda was not going to be best pleased.

After helping the woman in the passenger seat out of the car, they set off, stumbling through the grounds, towards the building which lay ahead of them in the darkness.

If the Doctor had stayed to examine the damage a little longer, he'd have heard some rather desperate thumps coming from the boot.

The reason why the instructors at the academy said that the Diving, Rolling Breakfall with Kick didn't work was because they knew what they were talking about.

The pain that lit up Chris's body as the bullet entered his shoulder couldn't have been more intense if a blow torch had been pressed up against his body.

Chris collapsed out of the forward roll, and lay sprawled on his back at the gunman's feet. Any kind of movement at all sent jarring stabs of agony 224

through his body. His whole body was burning. Had someone poured petrol on him and set him alight?

The pain receded and he started to feel groggy, almost drunk. His ears were full of loud static. From his worm's eye view, he could see Patsy struggling in Gordy Scraton's arm-lock. Chris's vision telescoped and they suddenly looked like giants fighting far above him. It all seemed strangely distant as if it somehow didn't have anything to do with him at all. He decided that he was just going to lie there and burn.

Gordy pointed his gun at him. Chris just stared helplessly up the dark, grey barrel and waited.

Another noise began to compete with the hissing in his ears. The whole street suddenly appeared to be filled with bright white light. The noise grew to a shrill rattling crescendo. And then Gordy and the gun and the noise disappeared in a smear of shiny metallic blackness.

Gordy howled once in utter terror and then was silenced for ever as the black cab swallowed him inside of itself, and hurtled away into the smog.

‘Get on your feet, Cwej,’ Patsy ordered, her voice filled with fear and determination. ‘We need to get off the street. Now!’

Chris screamed in pain as Patsy pulled him roughly to his feet. He tottered drunkenly, leaning heavily upon her. They stood, uncertainly, in the smog-filled street for a moment. An icy emerald glow appeared in the darkness ahead of them, marking the tip of a triangle that was completed by two brilliant white headlamps.

Patsy hooked her shoulder under Chris’s armpit to support him and they broke into a lumbering run for their lives.

When Jack had stowed away in the boot of Tilda’s convertible he hadn’t given any thought to how he might get out again. It had been a snap decision, born as much out of his anger with Gilliam as his concern for the Doctor.

He’d dashed down the front stairs of the Tropics and sprinted around the back where Tilda’s car was parked, hopping into the boot only moments before he heard the Doctor arrive with the strange woman from the painting in Moriah’s study.

The journey had been terrifying; even worse than the dive-bomber at the fairground. He’d rattled around in the small space like half-pennies in a porce-lain pig. The boot of the sports car was tiny, with only just enough room for him to curl up in a foetal position. He couldn’t even straighten his legs to take a kick at the lock.

Bugger! He began to feel faintly silly. Some rescue this was turning out to be! He was probably going to need rescuing himself. That was if the Doctor made it out of the asylum alive.

Jack slumped in the confined space, letting his weight fall against the back of the boot. He felt it give slightly under his back. He pushed again, and felt something crack. And then it dawned on him that the rear of the boot was also the back seat of the car. Filled with new hope, he levered himself with his feet, pushing against the seat and was quickly able to force a gap wide enough to allow him to squirm through into the back of the car.

His relief of being out of the dark box was intense. The Doctor had carelessly left the doors of the car wide open. A single headlight cut a beam of light into the misty darkness. Jack clambered out of the car, panting. After taking a moment to get his bearings, he hurried after

the Doctor across the wet grass.

The Doctor looked down upon the cavern from the small entrance cut into the wall close to the roof. The dark floor of the cave shifted and shimmered. Pools of black liquid erupted, forming strange, twisted shapes, before splashing back into the liquid form.

Whatever science created this strange material was alien even to the Doctor.

Quite unlike anything he had encountered before. He imagined the devasta-tion that a fleet of the murderous black cabs shaped from it might do to a city like London. If Moriah was successful, hundreds, perhaps thousand, would die.

He glanced at the woman standing next to him. Petruska stared impassively down upon her husband's work. The Doctor reached for her hand, and began to guide her down the rough stone steps which led to the cavern floor.

'Moriah. First King of Kr'on Tep, Emperor of the Seven Systems,' the Doctor's voice was a hushed whisper as he reached the last step, 'I wish to speak with you.'

Moriah stood in the middle of a circle of emerald fire, staring in wonder at the blossoming, spiralling shapes that towered above him. On hearing his name, he swung around to locate the new presence in his underground chamber.

'Is it not magnificent?' he exclaimed with passion. 'It is an expression of my thoughts, my desires, my will.' If Moriah was surprised that the Doctor had returned he didn't show it.

Despite the gravity of the situation, the scientist in the Doctor was curious.

'But what is it?'

'An artificial material that responds to my thoughts and feelings. I created it when I first attempted to bring my bride back from the dead. But it was far too crude and primitive to be shaped into the complexity of a whole person. I needed to build from human tissue itself. Now, are you ready to return to me 226

that which you stole –' he gestured to the writhing shapes which cast shadows on the walls of the cavern '– or must I loose my anger upon

London?'

'I have told you that you cannot have the Toys. They're a people in their own right now. They're not answerable to you.'

Moriah's face twisted into a snarl. 'Then the consequence will be on your head.'

As if in his response, a wave of black tar-like material reared up behind the Doctor; a tidal wave, threatening to crash down upon him.

'Moriah, wait! You don't need to trouble yourself with the Toys any more.

I've brought you what you most want,' the Doctor shouted. 'I have completed your work, I have brought your wife back from the dead.' He pointed to the woman who stood behind him in the shadows. 'If you agree to leave the Toys and the Earth in peace, then you may have her.'

Moriah laughed bitterly. 'You presume to offer me what *I* have struggled and failed to create for myself despite centuries of work? When I look into her eyes, I know that I will see her treachery written there. Do you come here to mock me?'

The Doctor shrugged, trying to look relaxed despite the wall of tar-like goo teetering over him. 'You don't have to take her. But can you bear to go on never knowing whether my offer was genuine? Never knowing whether you passed up your chance for happiness.' The Doctor held his hands behind his back and turned away from the large man, staring up at the trembling wave of gelatinous material as if it were an exhibit in a gallery.

'Wait,' Moriah said, almost hurriedly. 'Your attempts to manipulate me are naive in the extreme and yet –'

'And yet have they worked, Moriah?' the Doctor interrupted, too angry with the man to defer to him or to play any more games. 'Do you want to be reunited with your bride? If you do then give me your word that you will leave Earth immediately. Allow me to set the gateway.'

'Bring her to me.'

'And if she is all that you remember and desire will you leave here?'

‘If she is as you say, what reason would I have to stay?’

‘That’s what I’m counting on,’ the Doctor whispered to himself. He beck-oned the woman out of the darkness. Maintaining empathic control over the Toy wasn’t going to be easy without any physical contact. He crossed his fingers behind his back and took a deep breath.

Petruska stood a few feet away from Moriah. Despite her strange clothes she looked composed and regal. Moriah reached out to touch her face, hesitantly, as if he were expecting the worst; but not, the Doctor noted, without hope.

The Doctor closed his eyes. He concentrated on Petruska’s song. The song he had read on the walls of Gilliam’s memories. He focused upon its gen-227

tle, seductive melody, careful to ignore the words which were tucked away between its notes. In his mind, he sang the song to Moriah, following the delicate verses and feeling himself lifted by the confident march of the chorus.

When the Doctor opened his eyes again, Moriah had wrapped Petruska in his arms and they were kissing passionately. When they finally broke off, Moriah’s grey eyes were shining with tears.

‘You have brought her back to me,’ he said, choked. ‘She is exactly as I remember her when she was by my side.’

The Doctor smiled tightly, careful to keep giving voice to the song in his mind. He could already feel Moriah’s own resistance to Petruska. He could feel the man-god’s unconscious guilt crashing against her, unable or unwilling to hear and accept her song of love. Somewhere deep inside the centuries-old man, the Doctor was sure that Moriah knew that he was unworthy of his queen.

As the Doctor moved quickly over to one of the globes and began to programme the coordinates of the gateway, he began to improvise his own harmonies to the melody of the song, working hard to provide a sound full enough to drown out Moriah’s insecurities. It wasn’t easy: conducting a choir of internal voices was one thing, but simultaneously writing additional patterns for them to sing was quite another.

‘I have kept my side of the agreement, Moriah,’ the Doctor said through gritted teeth. ‘Now it is time for you to honour yours. It is

time for you to leave.' He pulled his paisley handkerchief from his top pocket and dabbed at the beads of cold sweat which had formed on his brow.

He wasn't going to be able to keep this up for much longer.

'Can't go on,' Chris panted. 'Pain. Hurts so much. Got to rest.'

Patsy glanced behind them into the smog. There was no trace of the monstrous vehicle that had swallowed Gordy Scraton, but it couldn't be far behind them. She had the distinct impression that it was playing a game of a cat and mouse with them.

'Come on Chris, don't give up on me now.' It was perverse, but ever since he'd been shot, she'd felt stronger, clearer headed. More herself. Whoever that was.

He needed her. And his need was keeping her alive. His need was all the blood in her veins and all the air she needed for her lungs.

Patsy half dragged, half carried Chris to the side of the road, just as she saw the black cab emerge through the smog behind them.

She looked around desperately for somewhere to hide. They'd walked further than she'd thought and were back outside the Top Ten Club. A small fire escape spiralled up to the roof of the club – if they could get even a few steps 228

up the fire escape then they would be safe from the taxi which was bearing down on them.

She tipped Christopher on to the fire escape ahead of her and he sprawled on the first couple of steps. He was half-conscious now, but still grunted in pain as his shoulder hit the iron bannister.

Patsy jumped up beside him, her lungs aching with the strain of her exer-tions. The cab was still coming. It slowed at the base of the metal staircase and seemed to hover uncertainly. Up close she could see that its surface was matt and tacky. Grit and small stones were embedded in the surface of the strange vehicle; it looked like a jelly that had fallen in the dirt.

The black cab was wider than the stairs. It touched the bannisters and its front wings bulged around the metal bars for a moment before it absorbed them into itself and began moving up the first step.

Patsy screwed her face up in disgust. She almost gave up, only the idea of the monstrous vehicle swallowing Christopher girded her into action. She climbed up past him before turning, getting hold of him under his arms and dragging his dead weight up the steps.

Come on, Squire Cwej. Don't give up on me yet.

The cab moved slowly, perhaps affected by trying to accommodate the railings within itself, but it showed no sign of giving up its chase.

Patsy reached the flat roof of the Top Ten Club and dragged Chris across to the far side. The air was clear of smog, the fires in Notting Hill had filled the night sky with dark orange streaks.

There wasn't anywhere to go from here. They were trapped.

She shook him gently. 'We're in trouble, Cwej; you can't go to sleep, not yet.'

He looked peaceful. She almost could taste his need to rest on her tongue.

Well, you can't always have what you want.

She slapped him rudely awake. 'Wake up, Adjudicator Cwej, or I'll have you transferred and get myself a decent squire.' Patsy didn't know what the words she was saying meant, but she knew who they belonged to.

'Roz,' he slurred and opened his eyes, focusing on something beyond her.

'Roz, behind you.'

The cab bounced on to the roof, accelerating, its bright headlamps chasing each other across the wet floor of the roof as it swung from side to side, searching them out in the darkness.

The air was like treacle in the underground cavern. The aniseed smell from the pools of black tar was overwhelming, and made Jack feel giddy and nauseous. He moved as quietly as he could down the crumbling stairs that were cut into the side of the cavern. Below him he could see the Doctor bent over one of the fiery spheres, behind him Moriah held his bride in his arms.

Jack's attention was distracted by movement in one of the corners of the cavern. From out of the shadows, he saw a figure in a white tunic stalk the Doctor. It was one of Moriah's blank-faced mannequins, armed with a double-pronged spear.

'Doctor,' Jack cried, but he was too far away and his voice was lost in the huge chamber.

Moriah's attention appeared to be completely focused on his bride.

Jack shouted down at the tiny figures again. At this distance he couldn't tell if the Doctor had heard him. He set off, taking the large, crumbling stone steps two at a time.

As he neared the floor of the cavern, he could see the Doctor more clearly.

His mouth was moving as if he were engaged in an anxious conversation with himself. His face was a mask of concentration. His eyes staring, without blinking, at the task in front of him.

The creature moved stealthily towards him, stalking the Doctor as if he were a dangerous animal and it a brave hunter. Jack saw that Moriah was looking over his bride's shoulder, watching the creature's progress with his old, impassionate eyes. The creature crept up behind the Doctor and raised its glinting spear, preparing to plunge it into his back.

'No!' Jack screamed. 'Doctor! Look out!'

The Doctor looked up from his task to see Jack running down the last of the stone stairs towards him and his face furrowed in desperate annoyance. 'Jack, don't, you'll spoil –' And then he must have understood the panic on Jack's face because he spun around just as the creature brought its weapon down upon him.

Chris blinked as he lay on the edge of the flat roof. Someone was shining lights in his eyes. Two bright white shining lights. They were getting nearer.

His shoulder felt frozen, the joint had locked and he couldn't feel his arm at all.

He blinked again. The shining lights were headlamps of a black cab – no, of *the* black cab. Part of his memory returned. The monster, coming for them out of the smog.

Through his tears he saw someone – Roz? – standing next to him. It was just like her to have to end up looking after him. Roslyn Forrester protecting her young squire.

No, that couldn't be right. Why not? His mind was a fog.

She stepped in front of him, waving her arms to attract the vehicle's attention. It swung towards her and she immediately darted away from Christopher, leading the monster away from him.

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He called after her but she didn't reply. His vision started to blur and darken, he fought the blackness, willing himself to focus: he didn't want to die while he could still see her.

For a moment she stood on the low wall of the roof, silhouetted against the dark orange of the night sky, facing the vehicle which was hurtling, hungrily towards her. It made a jump for her and then, for a moment, all Chris could see was the outline of the London taxi cab suspended in the air against the skyline of the city. And then it dropped out of the sky, plummeting towards the ground below.

The silver spear crashed into the glass sphere, and it shattered, spraying shards of glass everywhere. The green fire which burnt inside flared when it was exposed to the air in the cavern. It exploded upward, bathing the faceless creature's head in intense emerald flames. The creature made a guttural wail and its doughy flesh melted, dripping like porridge down on to its scorched tunic.

The Doctor rolled neatly out of his dive and turned to face Moriah. 'Oh very clever,' he barked. 'Very *honourable*.'

'I have my queen now, Doctor. What use have I for honour?'

Moriah was distracted by Petruska beginning to move in his embrace. 'What is it, my love?' he asked, smoothing her long, dark hair with his hand. She flinched from his caresses, squirming in his embrace. 'No,' he whispered. 'I do not believe it. What is happening?'

The Doctor stood, motionless. His blue eyes burning brightly beneath his heavy brow. 'She's expressing her true feelings for you, Moriah.'

'Are you responsible for this, Doctor? Have you instigated this deception?'

Moriah threw his bride down on to the ground. ‘Why?’ he howled. ‘Why can’t I have her back?’

As if in answer, Moriah’s veiled brides began to drift out of the shadows in the cavern to welcome their new sister into their ranks, as they had welcomed all of the Petruskas before her.

‘Because your wife is dead,’ the Doctor said, calmly. ‘Long dead.’

‘Then you will join her.’ Moriah reached out with one of his large hands and grabbed hold of the Doctor by the throat.

The Doctor struggled against the alien grip, never once taking his eyes off Moriah.

Jack tried to intervene, tried to pull one of Moriah’s huge arms away. The Doctor winced when he saw Moriah casually bat Jack away with the back of his free hand.

Moriah lifted the Doctor off the ground. ‘I shall have the pleasure of ending your life before I leave this place, Doctor. And one day I will find my queen.

If I have to kill a thousand people, I shall have her.’

The Doctor’s eyes bulged as he felt his windpipe begin to collapse. He’d used up all his tricks, all his plans. He didn’t have anything tucked up his sleeve. His aces were all spent, his trump card played and lost, and his friends were either hurt, had deserted him, or were dead.

Sometimes, Roz, the monsters just refuse to fall into their own traps. The thought made him smile somewhere deep inside of himself. He looked into Moriah’s eyes, and only felt pity for the huge man.

The world went dark.

It took Chris twenty minutes to stagger down to street level from the roof.

His head was thick with shock and he had to keep stopping to rest to prevent himself from blacking out.

All that remained of the taxi was a thick black smear which ran across the pavement. Lying within it, coated in a layer of slime was the body

of Gordy Scraton, and a blank-faced mannequin dressed in a suit two sizes too big for it.

Chris ignored the dead thug. He knelt in the black jelly by the mannequin that had once been Patsy. Her featureless body was twisted and broken by the fall. He wiped her blank face clean with his hand. He stayed like that until the ambulance came.

Above him, on the wall of the Top Ten Club, Patsy Monette stared sightless out of her photograph.

The Doctor felt the kindness of women's hands upon him. Moriah's grip on his throat was loosened, and he drew a rasping breath into his lungs. Only then was he sure that he was still alive.

He opened his eyes. He was in the middle of a crowd of veiled women. They swarmed around him, pushing past him, reaching for Moriah with clawed hands.

'You shall not leave us,' the women told their king in one voice. 'You are ours, Moriah,' they chanted. 'Just as we are yours.'

The First King of Kr'on Tep struggled violently against the women who beat him with their fists and tore at his skin with their bare hands, but eventually the sheer number of attackers overwhelmed him. He screamed in terror as he was buried under their many pounding fists.

The Doctor scrambled over to where Jack sat, rubbing his jaw where Moriah had struck him. 'Time to leave,' he said.

The first explosions shook the building just as the Doctor and Jack reached the main hallway of the Institute.

'I think visiting time must be over,' the Doctor shouted.

A huge crack appeared in the linoleum floor and the little man almost toppled into it. Jack had to grip the collar of his jacket and pull him back.

'What's going on?'

'The bird/globe is disintegrating. The Vortex is leaking through the gateway.'

Around them, mannequins in orderlies' uniforms staggered in confusion with no one to direct their thoughts.

Jack followed the Doctor as he edged around the yawning tear in the middle of the room. Kaleidoscopic light was spilling into the room from the underground chamber below, casting emerald butterfly shadows on the ceiling.

The building trembled violently beneath Jack's feet. As the Doctor opened the front door, the brace gave way and the wall above the door collapsed into the doorway, and the little man disappeared beneath a shower of bricks and cement.

'Doctor!' Jack fought his way through the clouds of dust and found him lying unconscious, half-buried in hospital rubble. He cleared away the larger bricks and then pulled the Doctor free. The Doctor was covered in grey dust and Jack thought he looked like a partly demolished sculpture.

Lifting the Doctor into a fireman's lift, Jack staggered out of the hospital.

Despite his small size, the Doctor was heavy and Jack only managed to put about twenty yards between them and the hospital before he collapsed, exhausted, on the gravel driveway. His mouth was full of bitter dust and he could feel his heart pumping madly in his chest. He never wanted to move again.

Jack turned back to the Institute and saw emerald light and smoke spilling out of every window of the tall, red-brick building. With a muffled crump, part of the roof collapsed in on itself.

That was when Jack heard the noise of a car. A black cab was racing towards them down the drive of the Petruska Institute, its headlights blazing.

Oh no, Jack panted, hardly believing his eyes. After everything he'd been through, this just wasn't fair. He looked at the Doctor lying face down in the gravel, where he'd dropped him.

And Jack Bartlett, site wages clerk, decided that whatever happened, he wasn't going to let the monster get the Doctor this time. He looked about him for a weapon, but there wasn't so much as a fallen branch.

So he let out the most fearsome scream he could manage and started to run towards the approaching monster, waving his fists angrily and

hopelessly in the air.

‘Come on then you bastard!’ he yelled, the dust he’d swallowed tearing at this throat. ‘Come on then!’

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It was only then that he noticed that the light on the taxi shone with a familiar orange glow.

The taxi skidded to a halt and Jack stood, frozen in its bright headlamps.

He squinted painfully at it, one arm still raised above his head.

‘Come on *deahs*,’ Tilda shouted as she leant out of the back of the cab. ‘The meter’s running. Get those lallies moving!’

Jack collapsed on the ground in front of the taxi, laughing uncontrollably.

He watched as Inspector Harris ran past him to collect the Doctor. Tilda hurried over to where Jack lay. She wrapped him up in her arms and hugged him tightly.

‘What time do you call this, daughter?’ she snapped, fixing him with one of her beady stares. ‘You’ve had us worried sick.’

‘Sorry, Mother,’ he whispered, and started laughing again.

And as the taxi turned and headed for home, the Petruska Institute disappeared in a rainbow of colours.

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Epilogue

Equal Affections

London, late twentieth century

The two people stood in the centre of the busy concourse of Victoria Station in an awkward silence. The Doctor, ever the gentleman, had insisted on carrying Gilliam’s rucksack from the taxi, and they’d had to stop for him to hand over her luggage.

And to say goodbye.

He looked uncomfortable as he hovered around her. He'd changed so much since Gilliam had seen him all those years ago. Not just a change of face and of body. But he was a gentler man now, softer, more. . . human. A strange word to use about the Doctor. He smiled awkwardly, just like a little boy. And she smiled back, openly.

Twenty-five years he'd left her stranded on an alien planet and he could make her forgive him with a single smile.

'A-ha!' he started suddenly, his eyes lighting up. He rummaged through the pockets of his tweed jacket for a moment before producing a small brown package. 'I almost forgot. Your passport, you left it behind when – It was left –' He paused. 'I'm sorry,' he said, finally. 'Really.'

She gave him a hug.

'I've rustled up some traveller's cheques and currency. Dollars, of course.

I've learnt that Arcturian pounds are accepted in rather fewer places than I'd been led to believe.'

'You're not making any sense, Doctor. As usual,' Gilliam said, opening up the package. She burst out laughing when she came across the photo in her passport: a vision of innocence and pigtails.

If I knew then what I know now, she told herself. She glanced at the front, grinned and then handed it back to the Doctor.

'Keep it as a momento, Doctor. It's years out of date anyway.'

The Doctor looked crushed. 'Oh no, I've spoilt your trip! How are you going to get past customs at Dover without a passport?'

She laughed. 'Doctor, I'm the queen of seven systems. I've spent the last twenty-five years governing half a dozen planets. I think I'll be able to find my way into Europe without a passport.'

'We're already in Europe,' he said, a smile creeping back over his face.

She touched her finger to his nose, making him go crosseyed. 'See, I succeeded already.'

'I should never have doubted you. Will you travel far?'

‘Who knows?’ she shrugged, nonchalantly; but she couldn’t keep the question out of her voice.

‘Not me. Not this time.’

‘Good. Then we’re both in for a surprise.’

He helped her struggle into the straps of her rucksack. ‘Take care, Perpugilliam Brown,’ he said, rolling his R’s with more enthusiasm than skill.

‘You too, Doctor.’ She fixed him with a hard stare. ‘And look after Christopher. We’re not as robust as you; we travelling companions are fragile things.’

The Doctor was about to speak but she silenced him, kissing him lightly on the lips, and then she turned and headed for the Dover train.

When she reached the platform gate, she turned to see whether he had set off for adventures new. He hadn’t. He was still standing where she had left him, swinging his umbrella gently in one hand. He waved once and then turned on his heel, disappearing completely into the crowd.

‘Goodbye, Doctor,’ she whispered.

Soho, London, late-summer 1958

The police box ground into existence across the road from Holborn Library.

The Doctor ushered Jack out, leaving the door open behind them.

‘Are you sure this is where you wanted to come, Jack? You had the Universe to choose from.’

‘Yeah, I know. But there’s something. . . someone I’ve got to see.’

The Doctor made a quick survey of the surroundings, no one appeared to have noticed the TARDIS’s sudden intrusion into the sunny afternoon.

The library was an ugly square concrete building, sitting slumped between two grander structures. At the end of the street, a saloon car pulled up. Even at this distance the Doctor recognized Tilda and the Major. Gently, they lifted a dark-haired boy out of the back of the car.

His movements were sluggish, graceless and uncertain, as if he were half asleep. He was dressed in a straitjacket, the arms of which had been untied. The boy flapped around inside of it like a newly hatched chick. Tilda tugged the straitjacket from his shoulders and the dark-haired boy passively allowed his arms to be threaded into a jacket.

Try as he might, the Doctor couldn't make out any features on the dark-haired boy's face.

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Tilda and the Major walked with the boy as he took his first few steps, supporting him between them. As the party approached the entrance to the library, the boy seemed to emerge from his dreamlike state. His steps became more confident, more assured. Tilda and the Major let him go and stood back and watched, like parents hovering behind a child as he ventured out on his first solo bicycle ride.

The Doctor could see the boy's face now. The face he'd first seen lying in the alley in Soho. Skin as smooth as soapstone in the summer sunlight. Dark eyelashes framing deep blue eyes.

The Doctor had been among humans for long enough to tell that the lad was handsome, but whatever it was that humans found so irresistible about each other's bodies was lost to the Doctor. Perhaps lost to him for ever. He couldn't be sure.

He felt a pang of loneliness, and rested a hand on Jack's shoulder. To get involved in the exchange of human emotions – however much trouble they always seemed to leave in their wake – just looked. . . well, ever so satisfying.

'I just wanted to see him,' Jack breathed, 'just one more time.' Quickly, he pushed past the Doctor and went back into the police box.

The door to the Library swung open as someone started to hurry out. The Doctor hesitated before following Jack into the TARDIS.

As if this were his cue, the dark-haired boy suddenly, deliberately, ran head-long into the sandy-haired boy coming out.

Soho, London, late-twentieth century

Soho was alive with colour and music and people from a hundred different countries. It had changed so dramatically since 1958 that Chris wouldn't have guessed that he was on the same streets. He sat at

a table outside a small busy café, content to watch the evening as it unfolded. Families on their way to the theatre, friends walking arm in arm chatting and laughing, lovers holding hands as they enjoyed the immunity of the Soho streets.

The pavement was so busy that people were walking in the gutter and in the road. He caught sight of a tweed jacket in the crowds, and then glimpsed a battered fedora. A red question mark poked out of the mass of people and a second later the Doctor appeared, walking alone in the crowd.

'Hello, Christopher,' he said, and popped into the café only to emerge a few moments later, carrying two fresh cappuccinos which he set down on the tiny table.

'Did you ask her if she wanted to come with us?' Chris asked, scrutinizing the Doctor.

The little man seemed confused for a moment. 'Her? What? Oh, you mean 237

Peri?' The Doctor spooned two sugars into his coffee, stirred it manically for a moment, and then shook his head. 'No, I didn't. Not this time. She's got travelling of her own to do.' The Doctor smiled, a little artificially, and then changed the subject. 'How are the troops?'

Chris had spent the morning playing eight-ball at La Quatrième Pie continental-style brassiere down the road. 'Dennis beat me five games to three.'

The Doctor glanced at his watch. 'How old is he now?'

Chris wasn't sure. 'Late forties, I think. His daughter was there, she's just graduated from UCL.'

The Doctor seemed satisfied. 'Moriah built them well.'

'Yes,' Chris said, and stared into his coffee. The radio above the counter started to play an old show tune and the wound in his shoulder began to ache as he recognized the singer.

Not a day

I wouldn't last a single day

Without your tender love

My dear

Chris rubbed at his shoulder. Would he have stayed with Patsy if he'd been able to save her? Despite having risked his life for her, he still didn't know.

Wouldn't ever know. His eyes came to rest on the Doctor's face. It was hard to believe that he'd been so angry with him.

'So, Christopher Cwej,' the Doctor announced, cutting through Chris's thoughts. 'It's just you and me.'

Chris couldn't help smiling warmly at the impossible man sitting opposite him in the busy café. 'The Doctor and Chris against the Universe?'

The Doctor blinked. ' *For* the Universe, I hope.'

'I'll drink to that.' Chris smiled and drained his gritty coffee. The Doctor suggested that they take their leave, and the two friends linked arms and walked out of the café and into the London evening.

And somewhere else, both earlier that same afternoon and yet more than thirty years before, an awkward boy, hurrying out of Holborn Library, his arms full of books, collided with a strange and beautiful thing.

BAD THERAPY

AN ORIGINAL DOCTOR WHO NOVEL

'WE'RE NOT LIKE YOU — WE CAN'T BE WHOLE ON OUR OWN.'

Seeking respite after the traumatic events in the thirtieth century, the Doctor and Chris travel to 1950s London. But all is not well in bohemian Soho: racist attacks shatter the peace; gangs struggle for territory; and a bloodthirsty driverless cab stalks the night.

While Chris enjoys himself at the mysterious and exclusive Tropics club, the Doctor investigates a series of ritualistic murders with an uncommon link – the victims all have no past. Meanwhile, a West End gangster is planning to clean up the town, apparently with the help of the Devil himself. And, in the quiet corridors of an abandoned mental hospital, an enigmatic psychiatrist is conducting some very bad therapy indeed.

As the stakes are raised, healing turns to killing, old friends appear in the strangest places – and even toys can have a sinister purpose.

Doctor Who

MATTHEW JONES wrote 'The Nine-Day Queen' for the Doctor Who short story collection **Decalog 2**. He also writes a regular column, 'Fluid Links', for Marvel's **Doctor Who Magazine**. He lives in east London and this is his first novel.

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